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THE WORKS

OF

ALPHONSE DAUDET

LIMITED EDITION

X.

NUMA ROUMESTAN

ROSE AND NINETTE

VOL. II.

Of the LIMITED EDITION of Alphonse Daudet one thousand copies have been printed for America.

This copy is Number 391

THE WORKS OF

ALPHONSE DAUDET

NUMA ROUMESTAN

TO WHICH IS ADDED

ROSE AND NINETTE

TRANSLATED BY

KATHARINE PRESCOTT WORMELEY

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

ILLUSTRATED BY ADRIEN MOREAU

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1899

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

VOLUME TWO.

Photogravured by Goupil & Co., Paris, from Drawings by Adrien Moreau.

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NUMA ROUMESTAN.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SPEECH AT CHAMBÉRY.

"Non, non, je me fais hironde—e—elle
Et je m'envo—o—le à tire d'ai—le—"

THE little Bachellery girl, clad in a fantastic cloak with a blue silk capuchon, to go with a little toque wound round with a great big veil, sang before her glass while finishing the buttoning of her gloves; her clear, sharp voice had risen that morning in full limpidity and in the best of humors. Spick and span for the excursion, the gay little body of her had a pleasant fragrance of fresh toilet and new gown, very neat and trig in contrast with the sloppy state of the hotel bedroom, where the remainder of a late supper was to be seen on the table, higgledy-piggledy with poker chips, cards and candles — all this close to the tumbled bed and a big bath-tub full of that gleaming "little milk" of Arvillard, so fine for calming the nerves and making the skin of the ladies bathing there as smooth as satin. Downstairs the basket-wagon was waiting, the horses shaking their bells and a full escort of youths caracoling in front of the porch.

Just as the toilet was finished a knock came at the door.

"Come in!"

Roumestan came in, much excited, and held out to her a large envelope:

"There, Mlle — O! read — read —"

It was her engagement at the opera for five years, with all the appointments she had wished, with the right of having her name printed big, and everything. When she had read it, article by article, coldly and with perfect poise, down to the great coarse signature of Cadaillac, then and only then she took one step towards the Minister, and, raising her veil, which was drawn closely about her face to keep out the dust on the trip, standing very close to him, her rosy beak in the air:

"You are very good — I love you —"

Nothing more than that was needed to make the man of the public forget all the embarrassments which this engagement was going to cause him. He restrained himself, however, and remained stiff, cold and frowning like a crag.

"Now, I have kept my promise and I withdraw — I do not care to disarrange your picnic party —"

"My picnic? Oh, yes, that 's so — we 're going to Château Bayard."

And then, casting both her arms around his neck, she said in a wheedling voice:

"You 've got to come with us; yes — O, yes, I tell you."

She brushed her long pencilled eyelashes across

his cheek and even nibbled a little at his statuesque chin, but not very hard, with the ends of her little teeth.

"What! with those young people? Why, it is impossible. You cannot dream of it?"

"Those young people? Much do I care for those young people! I will just let them rip — Mamma will let them know — oh, they are used to it! — You hear, Mamma?"

"I 'm going," said Mme. Bachellery, whom one could see in the next chamber with her foot on a chair, trying to force over her red stockings a pair of cloth gaiters much too small for her. She made the Minister one of her famous courtesies from the Folies Bordelaises and hurried downstairs to send the young gentlemen flying.

"Keep a horse for Bompard; he will come with us," cried the little girl after her; and Numa, touched by this attention, enjoyed the delicious pleasure of holding this pretty girl in his arms and hearing all that impertinent gang of young people walk off at a funeral pace with their ears drooping. Many a time had their jumpings and skippings caused his heart a lively time. One kiss applied for a long moment on a smile which promised everything — then she disengaged herself.

"Hurry up and dress yourself; I 'm in haste to be on the way."

What a buzz of curiosity through the hotel, what a movement behind the green blinds, when it was known that the Minister had joined the picnic at Château Bayard and that his big white waistcoat

and the Panama hat shading his Roman face were seen displayed in the basket-wagon in front of the little singer! After all, just as Father Olivieri who had learned a lot during his voyages remarked, what harm was there in it, anyhow? Did n't her mother accompany them, and Château Bayard, a historical monument, did it or did it not belong to the public buildings under Ministerial control? So let us not be so intolerant, great Heavens! especially in regard to men who give up their entire life to the defence of the right doctrines and our holy religion!

"Bompard is not coming — what 's the matter with him?" murmured Roumestan, impatient at having to wait there before the hotel exposed to all those plunging glances which volleyed upon him notwithstanding the canopy of the carriage. At a window in the first story an extraordinary something appeared, a something white and round and exotic, which spake in the voice of the former chieftain of Circassians, "Go on ahead, I 'll *rejine* you!"

Just as if they had only been waiting for the word, the two mules, low in shoulder but solid in hoof, got away shaking their travelling-bells, crossed the park in three jumps and whirled past the bathing establishment.

"Ware! ware!"

The frightened bathers and sedan-chairs hurried to one side; the bathing-maids, the big pockets of their aprons full of money and colored tickets, appeared at the entrance of the galleries; the

massage men, as naked as Bedoweens under their woollen blankets, showed themselves up to the waist on the stairway of the furnaces; the blue shades of the inhalation halls were thrust aside; everybody wished to see the Minister and the diva pass.

But already they are far away, whirled at railway speed through the intersecting labyrinth of Arvillard's little black streets, over the sharp cobblestones, close together and veined with sulphur and fire, out of which the carriage strikes sparks as it bounds along, shaking the low walls of the leprous-colored houses and causing heads to appear at the windows decked with placards. At the thresholds of the shops where they sell iron-pointed canes, parasols, climbing-irons, chalk stones, minerals, crystals and other catch-penny things for bathers appear heads which bow and brows that uncover at the sight of the Minister. The very people affected with goitre recognize him and salute with their foolish and raucous cries the grand master of the University of France, while the good ladies seated with him proudly draw themselves up stiff and most worshipful opposite, feeling well the honor which is being done them. They only lounge at their ease when they are quite clear of the village lands, on the fine turnpike toward Pontcharra, where the mules stop to blow at the foot of the tower of Le Truil, which Bompard had fixed upon as a trysting-place.

The minutes pass, but no Bompard! They know he is a good horseman because he has so often boasted of it; they are astonished and irri-

tated — particularly Numa — who is impatient to get on down that even white road which seems absolutely without an end, and get farther into that day which seems to open up like a life full of hopes and adventures. Finally, from a cloud of dust out of which rises a frightened voice that pants out *Ho! la! Ho! la!* emerges the head of Bompard, covered by one of those pith helmets spread with white cloth, having a vague look of a life-boat, like those used by the British army in India, which the Provencal had brought along with the intention of dramatizing and making imposing his trip to the baths, having allowed his hatter to believe that he was off for Bombay or Calcutta.

"Come on, my dear boy!"

Bompard tosses his head with a tragical air. Evidently at his departure things had taken place; the Circassian must have been giving the people of the hotel a very queer idea of his powers of equilibrium, because his back and arms are soiled with large spots of dust.

"Wretched horse!" said he, bowing to the ladies, while the basket-wagon started once more, "wretched horse! but I have forced him to a walk!"

He had forced him so well to a walk that now the strange beast would not go ahead at all, prancing and turning about on one spot like a sick cat, notwithstanding all the efforts made by his rider. The carriage was already far away.

"Are you coming, Bompard?"

"Go on ahead, I 'll *rejine* you!" cried he once more in his finest Marseilles twang; then he made a despairing gesture and they saw him rushing off in the direction of Arvillard in a furious whirl of hoofs. Everybody thought: "He must have forgotten something," and nobody thought about him further.

The turnpike curved about the hills, a broad highroad of France set with walnut-trees, having to the left forests of chestnut and pines growing on terraces and on the right tremendous slopes rolling down as far as one could see, down to the plain where villages appear crowded together in the hollows of the landscape. There were the vineyards, fields of wheat and corn, mulberries, almond-trees and dazzling carpets of Spanish broom, the seeds of which, exploding in the heat, kept up a constant popping as if the very soil were crackling and all on fire. One could readily suppose it were so, considering the heavy air and the furnace heat that did not seem to come from the sun — which was almost invisible, having retired behind a sort of haze — but appeared to emanate from burning vapors of the earth; it made the sight of Glayzin and its top, surmounted with snows which one might touch, as it seemed, with the end of one's umbrella, look deliciously refreshing to the sight.

Roumestan could not remember ever to have seen a landscape to be compared with that one; no, not even in his dear Provence; and he could not imagine happiness more complete than his

own. No anxiety, no remorse. His wife faithful and believing, the hope of a child, the prediction Bouchereau had uttered concerning Hortense, the ruinous effect which the appearance in the *Journal Officiel* of the decree as to Cadaillac would produce — none of these had any existence so far as he was concerned. His entire destiny was wrapt up in that beautiful girl whose eyes reflected his own, whose knees touched his, and who, beneath her blue veil turned to a rose-color by her blond flesh, sang to him while pressing his hand:

> "*Maintenant je me sens aimée,*
> *Fuyons tous deux sous la ramée.*"
> (Now I trust my lover's vows,
> Let us fly beneath the boughs.)

While they were rapidly whirling away in the breeze made by their motion, the turnpike, gradually becoming lonelier, widened out their horizons little by little, permitting them to see an immense plain in a semicircle with its lakes and villages and then mountains differing in shade according to their distance; it was Savoy beginning.

"O! how beautiful! O! how beautiful!" said the little singer; and he answered in a low voice: "How I do love you!"

At the last halt Bompard came up to them once more, but very piteously, on foot, dragging his horse after him by the bridle.

"This brute is most extraordinary," said he without further explanation, and when the ladies asked him if he had fallen: "No — it's my old wound which has opened again."

Wounded! where and when? He had never spoken of it before. But with Bompard one had to expect any surprise. They made him get into the carriage; and with his very mild-mannered horse quietly fastened behind they set off toward Château Bayard, whose two pepper-box towers, wretchedly restored, could be seen on a high piece of ground.

A maid servant came to meet them, a quick-witted mountaineer's woman in the service of an old priest formerly in charge of parishes in the neighborhood, who dwells in Château Bayard with the proviso that tourists may enter freely. When a visitor is announced the priest goes up to his bed-chamber in a very dignified way, unless indeed it is a question of personages of note; but the Minister, sly fellow, took good care not to give his title, so that it was in the guise of ordinary visitors that they were shown by the servant — with her phrases learned by heart and the canting tone of people of this sort — all that is left of the old manor of the *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*, whilst the driver laid out breakfast under an arbor in the little garden.

"Here you have the antique chapel where our good chevalier morning and evening . . . Ladies and gentlemen will kindly notice the thickness of the walls."

But they did n't notice anything at all. It was very dark and they stumbled against the broken bits of wall which were dimly lit from a loophole, the light of which fell through a hay-loft estab-

lished above the beams of the ceiling. Numa, his little girl's arm under his own, made some fun of the Chevalier Bayard and of "his worthy mother," dame Hélène des Allemans. The odor of ancient things bored them to death, and actually, at one time, in order to try the echo of the vaulted ceiling in the kitchen, Mme. Bachellery started to sing the last ballad composed by her husband, but really a very naughty one —

J'tiens ça d'papa . . . j'tiens ça d'maman . . .
(That 's me legacy from Popper . . . that 's me legacy from Mommer . . .)

and yet nobody was scandalized; quite the contrary.

But outside, when breakfast was served on a massive stone table, and after their first hunger had been appeased, the valley of the Graisivaudan, Les Bauges, the severe buttresses of the Grande-Chartreuse and the contrast made by that landscape full of tremendous lines with the little terrace grass-plot where this solitary old man dwelt — given up entirely to prayer, to his tulip-trees and to his bees — affected little by little their spirits with something sweet and grave which was akin to reflection. At dessert the Minister, opening his guide-book to refresh his memory, spoke about Bayard "and of his poor dame mother who did tenderly weep" on that day when the child, setting out for Chambéry to be page at the Court of the Duke of Savoy, caused his little bay nag to prance in front of the north gate, on that very place where the shadow

of the great tower was lengthening itself, slender but majestic, like the phantom of the old vanished castle.

And Numa, exciting himself, read to them the fine sentiments of Madame Hélène to her son at the moment of his departure:

"Pierre, my friend, I recommend to thee that before everything else thou shalt love, fear and serve God without in any wise doing Him offence, if that be possible."

Standing there on the terrace, sweeping off a gesture which carried as far as Chambéry:

"That is what should be said to children, that is what all parents, that is what all schoolmasters —"

He stopped short and struck his brow with his hand:

"My speech! — why, that is my speech! — I have it! splendid! the Château Bayard, a local legend — for fifteen days have I been looking for it — and here it is!"

"Why, it is pure Providence," cried Mme. Bachellery, full of admiration, but thinking all the same that the breakfast was ending rather solemnly. "What a man! What a man!"

The little girl seemed also very much excited, but of this impression Roumestan took no heed; the orator was boiling in him, behind his brow and in his breast; so, completely absorbed with his idea:

"The fine thing," said he, casting his eyes about him, "the fine thing would be to date the speech from Château Bayard —"

"O, if Mr. Lawyer should want a little corner in which to write —"

"Why, yes, only to jot down a few notes. You 'll excuse me, ladies, just for the time that will do to drink your coffee, and I will be back. It 's merely to be able to put the date to my speech without telling a lie."

The servant placed him in a little room on the ground floor, most ancient in appearance, whose domelike, vaulted ceiling still carries traces of gilding; an ancient room which they pretend was Bayard's oratory, just as they present to you as his bedroom the big hall to one side in which an enormous peasant's bed, with a canopy and dark blue curtains, is set up.

It was very nice to write between those thick walls into which the heavy atmosphere of the day could not penetrate, behind that half-open shutter which threw a pencil of light across the page and allowed the perfumes from the little garden to enter. At first the orator's pen was not quick enough to keep pace with the flow of his ideas; he poured out his phrases headlong, in a mass — well worn but eloquent phrases of a Provençal lawyer, filled with a hidden heat and the sputtering of sparks here and there, like the outflow of molten metal. Suddenly he stopped, his head emptied of words or rendered heavy by the fatigue of the journey and the weight of the breakfast. Then he marched up and down from the oratory to the bedroom, talking in a high voice, lashing himself, listening to his footsteps under the sono-

rous vaults as if they were those of some illustrious revenant, and then he set himself down again without the thoughts to put down a line. Everything swam about him, the walls brilliantly white-washed and that pencil of sunlight which seemed to hypnotize him. He heard the noise of plates and laughter in the garden, far, far away, and presently, with his nose on the paper, he had fallen fast asleep.

A tremendous thunder-clap made him start to his feet. How long had he been there? His head a little confused, he stepped out into the deserted and motionless garden. The fragrance of the tulip-trees made the air heavy. Under the vacant arbor wasps were heavily flying about the heeltaps in the champagne glasses and the bits of sugar left in the cups, which the mountaineer's woman was hurriedly clearing off, seized by the nervous fear of an animal at the approach of a thunder-storm and making the sign of the cross each time the lightning flashed. She informed Numa that the young lady had found herself with a bad headache after breakfast and so she had taken her to Bayard's chamber to sleep a little, closing the door "*vary* gently" in order not to bother the gentleman at his work. The two others, the fat lady and the man with the white hat, had gone down toward the valley and without any doubt they would catch it, because there was going to be a terrible . . . "just look!"

In the direction she indicated, on the choppy crest of Les Bauges and the chalky peaks of the

Grande-Chartreuse, which were enveloped in lightning flashes like some mysterious Mount Sinai, the sky was darkened by an enormous blot of ink that grew larger every instant, under which the whole valley took on an extraordinary luminous value, like the light from a white and oblique reflector, according as this sombre and growling threat continued to advance. All the valley shared in the change, the reflux of wind in the tops of the green trees, the golden masses of grain, the highways indicated by feathery clouds of white dust raised by the wind and the silver surface of the river Isère. In the far distance Roumestan perceived the canvas pith helmet of Bompard, which shone like a lighthouse reflector.

He went in again but could not take hold of his work. For the moment sleep no longer paralyzed his pen; on the contrary he felt himself strangely excited by the presence of Alice Bachellery in the next chamber. By the way, was she still there? He opened the door a little and did not dare to shut it again for fear of disturbing the charming slumber of the singer, who had thrown herself with loosened clothes on the bed in a troubling disorder of tumbled hair, open corset and white, half-seen curves.

"Come, come, Numa, beware! it is the bedroom of Bayard; what the deuce!"

Positively he seized himself by the collar like a malefactor, dragged himself back and forcibly seated himself at the table. He put his head between his hands, closing his eyes and his ears in

order to absorb himself completely in the last phrase, which he repeated in a low voice:

"Yes, gentlemen, the sublime advice of the mother of Bayard, which has come down to us in that mellifluous tongue of the middle ages — would that the University of France . . ."

The storm was so heavy and depleting, like the shade of certain trees in the tropics, it took away his nerve. His head was swimming, intoxicated by the exquisite perfumes given forth by the bitter flowers of the tulip-trees or else by that armful of blond hair scattered over the bed not far off. Wretched Minister! It was all very well to cling to his speech and to invoke the aid of the *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*, public instruction, religious culture, the rector of Chambéry — nothing was of any use. He had to return into Bayard's bedchamber, and this time so close to the sleeping girl that he could hear her gentle breathing and touch with his hand the tassel stuff of the curtains which framed this provoking slumber, this mother-of-pearl flesh with the shadows and the rosy undercolor of a naughty drawing in red chalk by Fragonard.

But even there, on the brink of temptation, the Minister still fought with himself and in a mechanical murmur his lips continued to mumble that sublime advice which the University of France — when a sudden roll of thunder, whose claps came nearer and nearer, woke the singer all of a jump.

"Oh, what a fear I was in — hello! is it you?" She recognized him with a smile, with those clear

eyes of a child which wakes up without the slightest embarrassment at its own disorder; and there they remained motionless and affected by the silence and growing flame of their desire. But the bedroom was suddenly plunged in a big dark shadow by the clapping-to of the tall shutters, which the wind banged shut one after the other. They heard the doors slam, a key fall, the whirling of leaves and flowers over the sand as far as the lintel of the door through which the hurricane plaintively moaned.

"What a storm!" said she in a very low voice, taking hold of his burning hand and almost dragging him beneath the curtains —

. . . . . .

"Yes, gentlemen, this sublime advice of Bayard's mother, which has come down to us in that mellifluous tongue of the middle ages —"

It was at Chambéry this time, in sight of the old Château of Savoy and of that marvellous amphitheatre formed of green hills and snowy mountains which Châteaubriand remembered when he saw Mount Taygetus, that the grand master of the University was speaking, thickly surrounded by embroidered coats, by palm decorations, by orders with ermine, by epaulettes decked with big tassels; there he was, dominating an enormous crowd excited by the power of his will and the gesture of his strong hand that still grasped a little ivory-handled trowel with which he had just spread the mortar for the first stone of the new Lyceum.

"Would that the University of France might

speak those words to every one of its boys: 'Pierre, my friend, I recommend to thee before everything else that . . .'"

And whilst he quoted those touching words emotion caused his hand, his voice and his broad cheeks to tremble at the memory of that great perfumed room in which, during the agitation caused by a most memorable thunder-storm, the Chambéry speech had been composed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VICTIMS.

A MORNING at ten o'clock. The antechamber at the Ministry of Public Instruction ; a long corridor badly lighted, with dark hangings and an oaken wainscot. The gallery is full of a crowd of office-seekers, seated or sauntering about, who from minute to minute become more numerous; each new arrival gives his card to the solemn clerk wearing his chain of office, who receives it, examines and without a word deposits it by his side on the slab of the little table where he is writing; all this in the haggard light from a window dripping from a gentle October rain.

One of the last arrivals, however, has the honor of stirring the august impassiveness of this clerk. He is a great big man, weather-beaten, sunburned and of a tarry aspect, with two little silver anchors in his ears for rings and with the voice of a seal that has caught a cold — just such a voice as one hears in the transparent early morning mists in the seaports of Provence.

"Let him know that it is Cabantous, the pilot — he knows what is up; he expects me."

"You are not the only one," answers the clerk, who smiles discreetly at his own joke.

Cabantous does not appreciate the delicacy of the joke; but he laughs in good humor, his mouth opening back as far as the silver anchors; and, making use of his shoulders, he pushes through the crowd, which falls aside before his wet umbrella, and installs himself on a bench alongside a sufferer who is almost as weather-beaten as himself.

"*Té! vé!* — why, it is Cabantous. Hello, how are you?"

The pilot begs his pardon — cannot recall who it is.

"Valmajour, you remember; we used to know each other down there in the arena."

"That is true, by gad. — *Bé*, my good fellow, you at least can say that Paris has changed you —"

The tabor-player has now become a gentleman with very long black hair pushed behind his ears in the manner of the musical person, and that, along with his swarthy complexion and his blue-black moustache, at which he is constantly pulling, makes him look like one of the gypsies at the Ginger-bread Fair. On top of all this a constant look of the village cock with its crest up, a conceit like that of village beau and musician combined, in which the exaggeration of his Southern origin betrays itself and slops over, notwithstanding his tranquil and ungarrulous appearance.

His lack of success at the opera has not frightened him off; like all actors in such cases he attributes his failure to a cabal, and for his sister

and himself that word "cabal" has taken on barbaric and extraordinary proportions, and moreover a Sanscrit spelling — the *khabbala* — a mysterious monster which combines the traits of the rattlesnake and the pale horse of the Apocalypse.

And so he relates to Cabantous that he is about to appear in a few days at a great variety show in a café on the boulevard — "An *eskating-rink* I would have you understand!" where he is to figure in some living pictures, at two hundred francs the evening.

"Two hundred francs an evening!" The eyes of the pilot roll in his head.

"And besides that, they will cry my *bography* in the street and my portrait in life size will be on all the walls of Paris, *wid* my costume of a troubadour of the old times, which I shall put on every evening when I do my music."

What flatters him most in all of this is the costume. What a bore that he is not able to put on his crenelated cap and his long-pointed shoes in order that he might show the Minister what a splendid engagement he has, and this time on good government stamped paper which was signed without Roumestan's aid! Cabantous looks at the stamped paper, smudged on both its faces, and sighs.

"You are mighty lucky; why, look at me — it's more than a year that I am *'oping* for my medal. Numa told me to send my papers on here and I did send my papers here — after that I never heard anything more about the medal, nor about the papers, nor about anything else. I wrote to the

Ministry of Marine; they don't know me at the Marine. I wrote to the Minister himself; the Minister did not answer. And what beats me is this, that now, when I have n't my papers with me and a discussion arises among the mercantile captains as to pilotage, the port councilmen won't listen to my arguments. So, finding that was the way of it, I put my ship in dry dock and says I to myself: Come, let's go and see Numa."

He was almost in tears about it, was this wretched pilot. Valmajour consoles and reassures him and promises to speak for him with the Minister; he does this in an assured tone, his finger on his moustache, like a man to whom people can refuse nothing. But after all the haughty attitude is not peculiar to him; all these people who are waiting for an audience — old priests of pious manners in their visiting cloaks; methodical and authoritative professors; dudish painters with their hair cut Russian fashion; thick-set sculptors with broad ends to their fingers — they all have this same triumphant air — special friends of the Minister and sure of their business. All of them, as they came in, have said to the clerk: "He expects me."

Each one is filled with a conviction that if only Roumestan knew that he was there! — This it is that gives a very particular physiognomy to the antechamber of the Ministry of Public Instruction, without a trace of those feverish pallors, of those trembling anxieties, which one perceives in the waiting-rooms at other Ministries.

"Who is he engaged with?" asks Valmajour in a loud voice, going up to the little table.

"The Director of the Opera."

"Cadaillac — all right, I know — it is about my business!"

After the failure made by the tabor-player in his theatre Cadaillac had refused to let him appear again. Valmajour wished to bring suit, but the Minister, who was afraid of the lawyers and the little newspapers, had begged the musician to withdraw his plea, guaranteeing him a round sum as damages. There is no doubt whatever with Valmajour that they are at this moment discussing these damages and not without a certain animation, too, for every few moments the clarion voice of Numa penetrates the double door of his sitting room, which at last is rudely torn open.

"She is not my protegée, she is yours!"

Big fat Cadaillac leaves the room, hurling this taunt, crosses the antechamber with an angry gait and passes the clerk who is coming up between two lines of solicitors.

"You have only to give my name."

"Let him only know that I am here."

"Tell 'im it's Cabantous."

The clerk listens to nobody, but marches very solemnly on with a few visiting cards in his hand and the door which he leaves partly open behind him shows the Minister's sitting-room filled with light from its three windows overlooking the garden, all of one panel of the wall covered by

the cloak turned up with ermine of M. de Fontanes, painted standing at full length.

A trace of astonishment showing on his cadaverous face, the clerk comes back and calls:

"Monsieur Valmajour."

The musician is not at all astonished at passing in this way over the heads of the others.

Since early morning his portrait has appeared placarded on all the walls of Paris. Now he is a personage and hereafter the Minister will no longer cause him to languish among the draughts in a railway station. Conceited and smiling, there he stands in the centre of the luxurious bureau where secretaries are occupied in pulling out drawers and cardboard pigeon-holes in a frantic search for something. Roumestan in a terrible rage scolds, thunders and curses, both hands in his pockets:

"Come now, be done with it! those papers, what the devil! — So they have been lost, have they, that pilot's papers? . . . Really, gentlemen, there is an absence of order here! . . ."

He catches sight of Valmajour: "Ha, it's you, is it?" and he springs upon him with one leap, the while the backs of the secretaries are disappearing by the side doors in a state of terror, each carrying off an armful of boxes.

"Now look here, are you never going to stop persecuting me with your dog-at-the-fair music? Have n't you had enough with one chance at it? How many do you require? Now they tell me that there you are on all the walls in your hybrid

costume. And what is all this bosh that they have brought me here? — that your biography? A mass of blunders and lies. You know perfectly well that you are no more a Prince than I am and that those parchments which are talked about here have never existed save in your own imagination!"

With the brutal gesture of the man who loves argument he grabbed the wretched fellow by the flap of his jacket with both hands and as he talked kept shaking him. In the first place this "eskating-rink" did n't have a penny — perfect fakirs! They would never pay him and all he would get would be the shame of this dirty advertisement on the strength of *his* name, the name of his protector. Now the newspapers could begin their jokes again — Roumestan and Valmajour the fifer for the Ministry; and, growing excited at the memory of these attacks, his big cheeks quivering with the anger hereditary in his family, with a fit of rage like those of Aunt Portal, more scaring in the solemn surroundings of an office where the personality of a man should disappear before the public situation, he screamed at the top of his voice:

"But for God's sake get out of here, you wretched creature, get out of here! We have had enough of your shepherd's fife!"

Stunned and silly, Valmajour let the flood go on, stuttering, "All right, all right," and appealed to the pitying face of Méjean, the only man whom the Master's rage had not sent into headlong flight,

and then gazed piteously on the big portrait of Fontanes, who looked scandalized at excesses of this sort and seemed to accentuate his grand Ministerial air the more, in proportion as Roumestan lost his own dignity. At last, escaping from the powerful fist which clutched him, the musician was able to reach the door and fly half-crazed with his tickets for the "eskating."

"Cabantous, pilot!" said Numa, reading the name which the impassive clerk presented to him, "There's another Valmajour! But no, I won't have it; I have had enough of being their tool — enough for to-day — I am no longer in . . ."

He continued to march up and down his office, trying to get rid of what remained of that furious rage, the shock of which Valmajour had very unfairly received. That Cadaillac, what impudence! daring to come and reproach him about the little girl, in his own office, in the Ministry itself, and before Méjean, before Rochemaure! "Well, certainly, I am too weak; the nomination of that man to the directorship of the opera was a terrible blunder!"

His chief clerk was entirely of that opinion but he would have taken good care not to say so; for Numa was no longer the good fellow he used to be, who was the first to laugh at his own embarrassments and took railleries and remonstrances in good part. Having become the practical chief of the cabinet in consequence of his speech at Chambéry and a few other oratorical triumphs, the intoxication that comes with heights

gained, that royal atmosphere where the strongest heads are turned, had changed him quite, had made him nervous, splenetic and irritable.

A door beneath a curtain opened and Mme. Roumestan appeared, ready to go out, her hair fashionably dressed and a long cloak concealing her figure. With that serene air which for five months back lit up her pretty face: "Have you your council to-day, my dear? Good-morning, Monsieur Méjean."

"Why, yes, council — a meeting — everything!"

"I wanted to ask you to come as far as Mamma's house; I am breakfasting there; Hortense would have been so glad!"

"But you see it is impossible." He looked at his watch: "I ought to be at Versailles at noon."

"Then I will wait for you and take you to the station."

He hesitated a second, not more than a second:

"All right, I will put my signature here and then we will go."

While he was writing Rosalie was giving Méjean news of her sister in a low tone. The coming of winter affected her spirits; she was forbidden to go out. Why did he not call upon her? She had need of all her friends. Méjean gave a gesture of discouragement and woe: "Oh, so far as I am concerned . . ."

"But I tell you yes, there is a good deal more chance for you. It is only caprice on her part; I am sure that it cannot last."

She saw everything in a rosy light and wanted

to have all the world about her as happy as she was — O, how happy! and glad with so perfect a joy that she indulged in a certain superstition never to acknowledge the fulness of her joy to herself. As for Roumestan, he talked about his affair everywhere with a comical sort of pride, to indifferent people as well as to his intimates:

"We are going to call it the child of the Ministry!" and then he would laugh at his joke till the tears came.

And of a truth those who knew about his existence outside, the household in the city impudently established with receptions and an open table, this husband who was so sensitive and tender and who talked of his coming fatherhood with tears in his eyes, appeared a character not to be defined, perfectly at peace in his lies, sincere in his expansiveness, putting to the rout the conclusions of those who did not understand the dangerous complications of Southern natures.

"Certainly, I will take you there," said he to his wife as they got into the carriage.

"But if they are waiting for you?"

"Well, so much the worse for them; let them wait for me — we shall be together all the longer."

He took Rosalie's arm under his own and pressing against her as if he were a child:

"*Té!* do you know that I am happy only in this place? Your gentleness rests me, your coolness comforts me. That Cadaillac put me into such a state of rage! He 's a fellow without any conscience, he 's a fellow without any morality — "

"You did n't know his character, then?"

"The way he is carrying on that theatre is a burning shame!"

"It is true that the engagement of that Mlle. Bachellery . . . why did you let him do it? A girl who is false in everything, her youth, her voice, even her eyelashes."

Numa felt his cheeks reddening; it was he himself who fastened them on, now, with his own great big fingers, those eyelashes! The little girl's mamma had taught him how to do it.

"Whom does this little good-for-nothing belong to, anyhow? The *Messenger* was talking the other day of influences in high circles, of some mysterious protection —"

"I don't know; to Cadaillac, undoubtedly."

He turned away in order to conceal his embarrassment and suddenly threw himself back horrified.

"What is it?" asked Rosalie, looking out of the window too.

There was the placard of the skating-rink, enormous, printed in crying colors which showed out under the rainy and gray sky, repeating itself at every street corner, on every vacant space of a naked wall and on the planks of temporary fences. It showed a gigantic troubadour encircled with living pictures as a border — all blotches in yellow, green and blue, with the ochre color of the tabor placed across the figure. The long hoarding which surrounded the new building of the city hall, past which their carriage was going at the

moment, was covered with this coarse and noisy advertisement, which was stupefying even to Parisian idiocy.

"My executioner!" said Roumestan with an expression of comic dismay. Rosalie found fault with him gently.

"No — your victim! and would that he were the only one! But somebody else has caught fire from your enthusiasm — "

"Who can that be?"

"Hortense."

Then she told him what she had finally proved to be a certainty, notwithstanding the mysteries made by the young girl — namely, her affection for this peasant, a thing which at first she had believed a mere fancy, but which worried her now like a moral aberration in her sister.

The Minister was in a state of indignation.

"How can it be possible? That hobnail, that bog-trotter!"

"She sees him with her imagination, and especially in the light of your legends and inventions which she has not been able to put in the right focus. That is why this advertisement and grotesque coloring which enrage you fill me on the contrary with joy. I believe that her hero will appear so ridiculous to her that she will no longer dare to love him. If it were not for that, I hardly know what would become of us. Can you imagine the despair of my father; can you imagine yourself the brother-in-law of Valmajour? — oh, Numa, Numa! poor involuntary maker of dupes."

He did not put up any defence, but indulged in anger against himself, against his "cussed Southernism" which he was not able to overcome.

"Look here, you ought to stay always just as you are, right up against my side as my beloved councillor and my holy protection. You alone are good and indulgent, you alone understand and love me."

He held her little gloved hand to his lips and said this with such a firm conviction that tears, real tears, reddened his eyelids: then, warmed up and refreshed by this effusion, he felt better; and so, when they reached the Place Royale and with a thousand tender precautions he had helped his wife out of the carriage, it was with a joyous tone and one free of all remorse that he threw the address to his coachman: "London Street, hurry, quick!"

Moving slowly, Rosalie vaguely caught this address and it gave her pain. Not that she had the slightest suspicion; but he had just said that he was going to the Saint-Lazare station. Why was it that his acts were never in accordance with his words?

In her sister's bedroom another cause for anxiety met her: she felt on entering that there had been a sudden stoppage of a discussion between Hortense and Audiberte, who still kept the traces of fury on her face while her peasant's head-dress still quivered on her hair bristling with rage. Rosalie's presence kept her in bounds, that was clear enough from her lips and eyebrows

viciously drawn together. Still, as the young wife asked her how she did, she was forced to answer and so began to talk feverishly of the *eskating*, of the advantageous terms which were offered them, and then, surprised at Rosalie's calm, demanded in an almost insolent tone:

"Aren't you coming to hear my brother? It is something that is at least worth while, if for nothing more than to see him in his costume!"

This ridiculous costume as it was described by her in her peasant dialect, from the dents in the cap down to the high curving points of the shoes, put poor Hortense in a state of agony; she did not dare raise her eyes to her sister's face. Rosalie asked to be excused from going; the state of her health did not permit her to visit the theatre. Besides, in Paris there were certain places of entertainment where all women could not go. The peasant woman stopped her short at the first suggestion.

"Beg your pardon, I go perfectly well and I hope I am as good as anybody else — I have never done any wrong, I have not; *I* have always fulfilled my religious duties."

She raised her voice without a trace of her old bashfulness, just as if she had acquired rights in the house. But Rosalie was much too kind and far too superior to this poor ignorant thing to cause her humiliation, particularly as she was thinking about the responsibility that rested on Numa. So, with the entire intelligence of her heart and revealing as usual the uncommon delicacy of

her mind, in those truthful words that heal although they may sting a little, she endeavored to make Audiberte understand that her brother had not succeeded and never would succeed in Paris, the implacable city, and that rather than obstinately continue a humiliating struggle, falling into the mire and mud of artistic existence, it would be far better for them to return to their Provence and buy their farm back again, the means to accomplish which would be furnished them, and so, in their laborious life surrounded by nature, forget the unhappy results of their trip to Paris.

The peasant girl let her talk to the very end without interrupting her a single moment, merely darting at Hortense a look of irony from her wicked eyes as though to challenge her to make some reply. At last, seeing that the young girl did not wish to say anything more, she coldly declared that they would not go, because her brother had all kinds of engagements in Paris — all kinds which it was impossible for him to break. Upon that she threw over her arm the heavy wet cloak which had been lying on the back of a chair, made a hypocritical curtsy to Rosalie, "Wishing you a very good day, Madame, and thanking you very much, I am sure," and left the room, followed by Hortense.

In the antechamber, lowering her voice on account of the servants:

"Sunday evening, *qué?* half past ten without fail!" And in a pressing, authoritative voice: "Come now, you certainly owe that to your *pore*

friend! Just to give him a little heart . . . and to start with, what do you risk, anyhow? I am coming to get you and I am going to bring you back!"

Seeing that Hortense still hesitated, she added almost aloud in a tone of menace: "Come now, I would like to know: are you his betrothed or not?"

"I'll come, I'll come," said the young girl greatly alarmed.

When she returned to the room, seeing that she looked worried and sad, Rosalie asked her:

"What are you thinking about, my dear girl? are you still dreaming the continuation of your novel? It ought to be getting pretty well forward in all these months," added she, taking her gayly around the waist.

"Oh, yes, pretty well forward — "

After a silence Hortense continued in an obscure tone of melancholy: "But the trouble is, I can't see my way to the close of the novel."

She didn't care for him any more: it may be that she never had loved him. Under the transforming power of absence and that "tender glory" which misfortune gave to the Moor Abencerage he had appeared to her from a distance as her man of destiny. It seemed a proud act on her part to knit her own existence with that of one who was abandoned by everything, success and protectors together. But when she got back to Paris, what a pitiless clearness of things! What

a terror to perceive how absolutely she had made a mistake!

To start with, Audiberte's first visit had shocked her because of the new manners of the girl, too familiar and free and easy, and because of the look of an accomplice which she gave when telling her in whispers: "Hush, don't say anything! he's coming to get me . . ."

That kind of action seemed to her rather hasty and rather bold, more especially the idea of presenting this young man to her parents. But the peasant girl wanted to hurry things. And then, all at once, Hortense perceived her error when she looked upon this artist of the variety stage with his long hair behind his ears, full of stage movements, denting in and shifting his sombrero of Provence on his characteristic head — always handsome, of course, but full of a plain preoccupation to appear so.

Instead of taking a lowly manner in order to make her forgive him for that generous spirit of interest which she had felt for him, he preserved his air of a conqueror, his silly look of the victor, and without saying a word — for he would hardly have known what to say — he treated this finely organized Parisian girl just as he would in similar conditions have treated *her*, the Des Combette girl — took her by the waist with the motion of a soldier and troubadour and wanted to press her to his breast. She disengaged herself with a sudden repulsion and a letting go of all her nerves, leaving him there looking foolish and astonished, while

Audiberte quickly intervened and scolded her brother violently. What kind of manners had he, anyhow? It must have been in Paris that he learned such manners, in the Faubourg Saint *Germoyne*, without a doubt, among his duchesses?

"Come now, wait at least until she is your wife!"

And turning to Hortense:

"O, he is so in love with you; his blood is parching with his love, *pécaïré!*"

From that time on, when Valmajour came to get his sister he considered it necessary to assume the sombre and desperate air of an illustration to a ballad: "'The ocean waits for me,' the Knight *hadjured.*" In other conditions the young girl might have been touched, but really the poor fellow seemed too much of a nullity. All he knew how to do was to smooth the nap of his soft hat while reciting the list of his successes in the faubourg of the nobles, or else the rivalries of the stage. One day he talked to her for a whole hour about the vulgarity of handsome Mayol, who had refrained from congratulating him at the end of a concert; and all the while he kept repeating:

"There you are with your Mayol! . . . *Bé!* he is not very polite, your Mayol is n't!"

And all this was accompanied by Audiberte's attitudes of watchfulness, her severity of a policeman of morals, and this in the face of these very cold lovers! O, if she had been able to divine what a terror possessed the soul of Hortense, what a loathing for her frightful mistake!

"Ho! what a capon — what a capon of a girl —" she would sometimes say to her, trying to laugh, with her eyes brimming with rage, because she considered that this love-affair was dragging too much and believed that the young girl was hesitating for fear of meeting the reproaches and anger of her parents. Just as if that would have weighed a straw in the balance for such a free and proud nature, had there been a real love in her heart; but how can one say: "I love him," and buckle on one's armor, rouse one's spirits and fight, when one does not love at all?

However, she had promised, and every day she was harassed by new demands. For instance there was that first night at the skating-rink, to which the peasant girl insisted upon taking her, whether or no, counting upon the singer's success and the sympathy of the applause to break down the last objections. After a long resistance the poor little girl ended by consenting to skip out secretly for that one night behind the back of her mother, making use of lies and humiliating complications. She had given way through fear and weakness, perhaps also with the hope of getting her first impression back again at the theatre — that mirage which had vanished; of lighting up again, in fact, that flame of love which was so desperately quenched.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SKATING-RINK.

WHERE was it? Whither was she being taken? The cab had been going for a long, long time; seated at her side, Audiberte had been holding her hands, reassuring her and talking to her with a feverish violence. She did not look at anything, she did not hear anything; the noise of the wheels, the sharp tones of that shrill little voice had no sense for her mind whatever; nor did the streets and boulevards and house-fronts seem to her to wear their usual aspect, but were discolored by the lively emotion within, as if she were looking at them out of the carriage in a funeral or marriage procession.

Finally they brought up with a jerk and stopped before a wide pavement inundated by white light which carved the crowd of people swarming here into black sharp-cut shadows. At the entrance of the large corridor was a wicket for the tickets, then a double door of red velvet, and right upon that a hall, an enormous hall, which with its nave and its side aisles and the stucco on its high walls, recalled to her an Anglican church which she had once visited on the occasion of a marriage. Only

in this case the walls were covered with placards and advertisements in every color, setting forth the virtues of pith helmets, shirts made to measure for four francs and a half and announcements of clothing-shops, alternating with the portrait of the tabor-player, whose biography one could hear cried in that voice of a steam-valve used by programme-sellers. They were in the midst of a stunning noise in which the murmur of the circulating mob, the humming of the tops on the cloth of the English billiard tables, calls for drinks, snatches of music broken by patriotic gunshots coming from the back of the hall, were dominated by a constant noise of roller skates going and coming across a broad asphalted space surrounded by balustrades, the centre of a perfect storm of crush hats and bonnets of the time of the Directory.

Hortense walked behind the Provençal girl, anxious and frightened, now turning pale and now turning red beneath her veil, following her with difficulty through a perfect labyrinth of little round tables at which women were seated two and two drinking, their elbows on the table, cigarettes in their mouths and their knees up, overwhelmed with a look of boredom. Against the wall from point to point stood crowded counters and behind each was a girl standing erect, her eyes blackened with kohl, her mouth red as blood and little flashes of steel coming from a bang of black or russet hair plastered over her brow. And this white and black of painted skin, this smile with its painted vermilion-point, were to be found on all the women, as if it

were a livery belonging to nocturnal and pallid apparitions which all were forced to wear.

Sinister also was the slow strolling of the men who elbowed their way in an insolent and brutal manner between the tables, puffing the smoke of their thick cigars right and left with the insult of their marketing as they pushed about to look as closely as possible at the wares. And what gave it still more the impression of a market was the cosmopolite public talking all kinds of French, a hotel public which had just arrived and run into the place in their travelling clothes — Scotch bonnets, striped jackets, tweeds still full of the fog of the Channel and Muscovite furs thawing fast in the Paris air. And there were the long black beards and insolent airs of people from the banks of the Spree covering satyr grins and Tartar mugs; there too were Turkish fezzes surmounting coats without any collars, negroes in full evening dress gleaming like the silk of their tall hats and little Japanese men dressed like Europeans, dapper and correct, like tailors' advertisements fallen into the fire.

"*Bou Diou!* How ugly he is," said Audiberte suddenly, as they passed a very solemn Chinaman with his long pigtail hanging down the back of his blue gown; or else she would stop and, nudging her companion with her elbow, cry "*Vé! vé!* see the bride!" and show her some woman dressed entirely in white lounging on two chairs — one of which supported her white satin shoes with silver heels — the waist of her dress wide open, the train of her gown all which-way, and orange flowers fas-

tening the lace of a short mantilla in her hair. Then, suddenly scandalized by certain words which gave her the clue to these very chance bridal flowers, the Provençal girl would add in a mysterious manner: "A regular snake, you know!" Then suddenly, in order to drag Hortense away from a bad example, she would hurry her toward the central part of the building where a theatre rose far in the back, occupying the same place as the choir in a church. The stage was there under electric flames which came and went in two big glass spheres away up in the ceiling, like two gleaming, starry eyes of an Eternal Father in a book of holy images.

Here they could compose themselves after the tumultuous wickedness of the lobbies. Families of little citizens, the shopkeepers of the quarter, filled the orchestra stalls. There were few women. It might have been possible to believe oneself in some kind of an auditorium, were it not for the horrible noise all about, which was always being overborne by the regular rolling of the skaters on the asphalt floor, drowning even the brass instruments and the drums of the orchestra, so that really on the boards all that was possible was the dumb-show of living pictures.

As they seated themselves the curtain went down on a patriotic scene: an enormous Belfort lion made of cardboard, surrounded by soldiers in triumphant poses on crumbling ramparts, their military caps stuck on the ends of their guns, gesticulating to the measure of the Marseillaise,

which nobody could hear. This performance and this wild excitement stimulated the Provençal girl; her eyes were bulging in her head; as she found a place for Hortense she exclaimed:

"*Qué!* we are nice here, *qué!* But do haul up your veil — don't tremble so, there is no danger *wid* me!"

The young girl did not answer, still overwhelmed by the impression of that slow, insulting crowd of strollers where she had been confounded with the rest, among all those livid masks of women. And behold, right in front of her, she found those horrible masks once more, with their blood-stained lips — found them in the grimacing faces of two clowns in tights who were dislocating all their joints, a bell in each hand with which they were sounding out, whilst they frolicked about, an air from "Martha" — a veritable music of the gnomes, formless and stuttering, very much in its place in the musical babel of the skating-rink. Then the curtain fell again, and for the tenth time the peasant girl stood up and sat down again, fussed about, fixed her head-dress anew and suddenly exclaimed, as she looked down the programme: "There, the Cordova Mount — the summer locusts, the farandole — there, there, it is beginning, *vé, vé!*"

Rising once more, the curtain displayed upon the background of the scenery a lilac mountain, up which mounted buildings of stone most weird in construction, partly castle, partly mosque, here a minaret and there a terrace; they rose in

ogival arches, crenelations and Moorish work, with aloes and palm-trees of zinc rising at the foot of towers sharply cut against the indigo blue of a very crude sky. One may see just such absurd architecture in the suburbs of Paris among villas inhabited by newly enriched merchants. In spite of all, in spite of the crying tones of the slopes blossoming with thyme and exotic plants placed there by mistake because of the word "Cordova," Hortense was rather embarrassed at sight of that landscape which held for her the most delightful recollections. And that palace of the Turk perched upon the mountain all rose-colored porphyry, and that reconstructed castle, really did seem to her the realization of her dreams, but quite grotesque and overdone, as it happens when one's dream is about to slip into the oppression of a nightmare.

At a signal from the orchestra and from an electric jet, long devil's-darning-needles, personated by girls in an undress of tightly-fitting silks, a sort of emerald-green tights, rushed upon the stage waving their long membranous wings and whirling their wooden rattles.

"What! those are locusts? Not much!" said the Provençal girl indignantly.

Already they had arranged themselves in a half circle, like a crescent-shaped mass of seaweed, all the time whirling their rattles, which sounded very distinctly now, because the row made by the parlor skates was softened and for a moment the noise of the lobby was hushed in a close wall of heads leaning toward the stage, their eyes glaring

under every kind of head-dress in the world. The wretchedness which tore Hortense's heart grew deeper when she heard coming, at first from afar and gradually increasing, the low sound of the tabor.

She would have liked to flee in order not to have seen what was coming. In its turn the shepherd's pipe sounded out its high notes and the farandole, raising under the cadence of its regular steps a thick dust the color of the earth, unrolled itself with all the fantastic costumes imaginable, short skirts meant to lure the eye, red stockings with gold borders, spangled waists, head-dresses of Arab coins, of Indian scarfs, of Italian kerchiefs or those from Brittany or Caux, all worn with a fine Parisian disdain of truth to locality.

Behind them, pushing forward on his knee a tabor covered with gold paper, came the great troubadour of the placards — his legs incased in tights, one leg yellow with a blue shoe on and one leg blue shod in yellow, with his satin waistcoat covered with puffs and his crenelated velvet cap overshadowing a countenance which remained quite brown despite cosmetics, and of which nothing could be seen well except a big moustache stiffened with Hungarian pomade.

"Ah!" said Audiberte in perfect ecstasy.

When the farandole had taken up its place on the two sides of the stage in front of the locusts with their big wings, the troubadour, standing alone in the centre, saluted with an air of assurance and victory under the glaring eyes of the

Eternal Father whose rays poured a luminous hoarfrost upon his coat.

The aubade began, rustic and shrill, yet it went forward into the halls hardly farther than the foot-lights; there it lived a very short life, fighting for a moment with the flamboyant banners on the ceiling and the columns of the enormous interior, and then fell flat into a great and bored silence. The public looked on without the slightest comprehension. Valmajour began another piece, which at the first sounds was received with laughter, murmurs and cat-calls. Audiberte took Hortense's hand:

"Listen! that's the cabal!"

At this point the cabal consisted merely of a few "Heh! louder!" and of jokes of this sort, which were called out by a husky voice belonging to some low woman on seeing the complicated dumb-show that Valmajour employed: "Oh, give us a rest, you chump!"

Then the rink took up again its sound of parlor skates and of English billiards and its ambulatory marketing, overwhelming the shepherd's pipe and the tabor which the musician insisted upon using until the very end of the aubade. After this he saluted again, marched forward toward the foot-lights, always accompanied by that mysterious grand air which never quitted him. His lips could be seen moving and a few words came here and there into ear-shot: "It came to me all of a sudden . . . one hole . . . three holes . . . the good God's *birrd* . . ."

His despairing gesture was understood by the

orchestra and gave the signal for a ballet in which the locusts twined themselves about the odalisques from Caux and formed plastic poses, undulatory and lascivious dances beneath Bengal flames which threw their rainbow light as far as the pointed shoes of the troubadour, who continued his dumb-show with the tabor in front of the castle of his ancestors in a great glory and apotheosis.

There lay the romance of poor little Hortense! That is what Paris had made of it.

The clear bell of the old clock hanging on the wall of her chamber sounded one as Hortense roused herself from the arm-chair into which she had fallen utterly crushed when she entered. She looked around her gentle maiden's nest, warm with the reassuring gleams of a dying fire and of an expiring night-lamp.

"What am I doing here? Why did I not go to bed?"

She could not remember at first what had happened, only feeling a complete sickness through her entire being and in her head a noise which made it ache. She stood up and walked a step or two before she perceived that she still wore her hat and mantle; then all came back to her. She remembered then their departure after the curtain fell, their return through the hideous market, more brilliantly illumined than before, among drunken book-makers fighting with each other in front of a counter, through cynical voices

whispering a sum of money as she passed — and then the scene at the exit, with Audiberte who wished her to come and felicitate her brother; then Audiberte's wrath in the coach, the abuse which the creature heaped upon her, only ended by Audiberte humiliating herself before her, and kissing her hands for pardon; all that and still other things danced through her memory along with the horrible faces of the clowns, harsh noises of bells, cymbals and rattles, and the rising up of many-colored flames about that ridiculous troubadour to whom she had given her heart! A terror that was physical roused her at that idea:

"No, no; never! I'd far rather die!"

All of a sudden, in the looking-glass in front of her, she caught sight of a ghost with hollow cheeks and narrow shoulders drawn together in front with the gesture of a person shuddering with cold. The spectre looked a little like her, but much more like that poor Princess of Anhalt who had so roused her curiosity and pity at Arvillard that she had described her sad symptoms in a letter. The princess had just died at the opening of winter.

"Why, look — look!" She bent forward, came nearer to the glass and recalled the inexplicable kindness that everybody down there had shown her, the fright her mother evinced, the tenderness of old Bouchereau at her departure — and understood! Now at last she knew what it was, she knew the end of the game! It was here without any one to aid it. Surely it was long enough she had been looking for its coming.

CHAPTER XVI.

"AT THE PRODUCTS OF THE SOUTH."

"MLLE. HORTENSE is very ill. Madame will receive nobody."

For the tenth time during the ten days that had passed Audiberte had received the same answer, motionless before that heavy-timbered door with its knocker, the like of which can scarcely be found except beneath the arcades of the Place Royale, a door which once shut seemed to her to refuse forever an entrance to the old house of the Le Quesnoys.

"Very well," said she, "I am not coming back; it must be they now who shall call me back."

In great agitation she set out again through the lively turmoil of that commercial quarter, where drays laden with cases and barrels and iron bars, noisy and flexible, were forever passing the push-carts that rolled under the porches and back into the courtyards where the coopers were nailing up the cases for export. But the peasant girl was not aware of this infernal row and of the rumbling of labor which shook the high houses to their very topmost floors; in her venomous head a very different kind of row was going on, a clashing of brutal thoughts and a terrible clangor

of foiled wishes. So she set forth, feeling no fatigue, and in order to economize the 'bus fare crossed on foot the entire distance from the Marais to Abbaye-Montmartre Street.

After a fierce and lively peregrination from one lodging to the other, hotels and furnished apartments of all kinds, from which they were expelled each time on account of the tabor-playing, they had just recently made shipwreck in that quarter. It was a new house which had allured, at the cheap prices for housewarmers, a temporary horde of girls, Bohemians and business agents, and those families of adventurers such as one sees at the seaports, a floating population which shows its lack of work on the balconies, watching arrivals and departures in hopes that there may be something to be gained for them in the flood. Fortune is here the flood on which they cast their watchful eyes.

The rent was very high for them to pay, especially now that the skating-rink had failed and it was necessary to sue upon government stamped paper for the price of Valmajour's few appearances. But the tabor did not bother anybody in that freshly-painted barrack whose door was open at every hour of the night for the different crooked businesses of the tenants — not to speak of all the quarrels and rows that were going on. On the contrary, it was the tabor-player who was bothered. The advertising on placards, the many-colored tights and his fine moustaches had aroused perilous interest among the ladies of the skating-

rink less coy than that prude of a girl down there in the Marais. He was acquainted with actors at the Batignolles, all that sweet-scented crowd which met in a pot-house on the Boulevard Rochechouart called the Straw-Lair. This same Straw-Lair, where people passed their time in loafing fatly, playing cards, drinking lager beer and passing from one to the other the scandal of the little theatres and the lowest class of gallantry, was the enemy and the horror of Audiberte. It was the cause of savage rages, under the stormy blows of which the two Southerners bent their backs as under a tempest in the tropics, merely revenging themselves by cursing their tyrant in a green skirt and talking about her in that mysterious and hateful tone which schoolboys and servants use: "What did she say? how much did she give you?" and playing into each other's hands in order to slip away behind her back. Audiberte knew this well and watched them; she did her business outside quickly, impatient to get home; and particularly was it so that day, because she had left them early in the morning. As she ascended the stairs she stopped a moment, hearing neither tabor nor shepherd's pipe.

"Oh, the beggarly wretch, he 's off again to his Straw-Lair!"

But as she came in at the door her father ran up to her and headed the explosion off.

"Now don't squeal, somebody's come to visit you; a gentleman from the *Munistry!*"

The gentleman was waiting in the drawing-

room; for, as it always happens in these buildings, cheaply built and made by machinery, with every room on each floor exactly the same, one above the other, they too had a drawing-room hung with a cheap paper, creamy and waffled into patterns till it looked like a dish of beaten eggs, a drawing-room which made the peasant girl a very proud woman. Méjean was passing in review most compassionately the Provençal furniture scattered about this dentist's waiting-room, full of the crude light from two windows guiltless of curtains — the *coco* and the *moco* (tumbler-holder and lamp-holder), the kneading-trough, the bread-basket much banged about by house-movings and by travel — these showed their rural rustiness alongside of the cheap gilding and wall paintings. The haughty profile of Audiberte, very pure in its lines, surmounted by her Sunday head-dress, which seemed just as out-of-place in the fifth story of a Parisian apartment house, completed the feeling of pity which he had concerning these victims of Roumestan; and so he introduced very gently the cause of his visit.

The Minister, wishing to spare the Valmajours new misfortunes, for which up to a certain point he felt himself responsible, sent them five thousand francs to pay for their losses in having changed their home and to carry them back again to their own place. He took the bills from his purse and laid them on the old dark kneading-trough of nutwood.

"So, then, we 'll have to leave?" asked the

peasant girl without budging an inch and pondering a while.

"The Minister desires that you should go as soon as possible; he is anxious to know that you have returned to your home as happy as you were before."

Old Valmajour cast his eye around at the bank-notes:

"As for me, that seems reasonable enough — *de qué n'en disés?*"

But she would not say anything and waited for the sequel, which Méjean introduced by twisting and turning his purse:

"And to those five thousand francs we will add five thousand more which are here, in order to get back again — to get back again — "

His emotion choked him. Cruel was the commission which Rosalie had given him. Ah, how often it costs a lot to be considered a quiet-loving, strong man; much more is demanded of such a one than of other people! Then he added very rapidly — "the photograph of Mlle. Le Quesnoy."

"At last! now we have got to it. The photograph — did n't I know it, by heavens?" At every word she bounded up like a goat. "And so you really believe that you can make us come from the other end of France, that you can promise everything to us — to us who never asked for anything — and then that you can put us out of doors like so many dogs who have done their worst and left their dirt everywhere? Take

back your money, gentleman! You can be dead sure that we sha'n't leave, and you can say so there, and also that the photograph won't be returned to them! That 's a paper and a proof, that is. I keep it safe in my little bag; it never leaves me and I shall show it about through Paris and what is written upon it, so that all the world may know that all those Roumestans are no better than a family of liars — of liars — "

She was foaming with rage.

"Mlle. Le Quesnoy is very, very ill," said Méjean, with great solemnity.

"*Avaï!*"

"She is leaving Paris, and in all probability will never return — alive!"

Audiberte said not a word, but the silent laugh of her eyes, the implacable *no* which was written upon her classic brow, on which the hair grew low beneath the little lace head-dress, were sufficient to warrant the firmness of her refusal. Then a temptation seized Méjean to throw himself upon her, tear the little Indian bag from her girdle and fly with it; still, he restrained himself, attempted a few useless expostulations, and then, quivering with rage likewise, he said, "You will repent of this," and to the great regret of Father Valmajour, left the house.

"Look out, little girl, you are going to bring us into some misfortune!"

"Not much! It 's them that we 'll give trouble to; I am going to ask the advice of Guilloche."

GUILLOCHE, CONTENTIEUX.

Behind the yellow card bearing those two words, fastened on the door which was opposite their own, was one of those terrible business men whose entire instalment consists of an enormous leather portfolio containing the minutes and notes of rancid lawsuits, sheets of white paper for secret denunciations and begging letters, bits of pie-crust, a false beard and sometimes even a hammer with which to strike milkwomen dead, as was seen recently in a famous lawsuit. This type of man, of whom many exist in Paris, would not be worthy of a single line if said Guilloche, a name which was as good as a signboard when one considered his countenance divided up into a thousand little symmetrical wrinkles, had not added to his profession an entirely new and characteristic department.

Guilloche did the business of penalties for schoolboys and collegians. A poor devil of an usher, when the classes came out from recitation, went about collecting the penalties in the way of copies to be turned in. He stayed awake far into the night copying lines of the Æneid or the various forms of the Greek verb *luo*. When there was lack of regular business Guilloche, who was a graduate of college, harnessed himself up for this original work, which he found fairly profitable.

Audiberte's matter having been explained to him, he declared that it was excellent. The Minister might be legally held up and the news-

papers might be made to come down; the photograph alone was worth a mine of gold; only it was necessary to use time to go hither and thither and he must have advances of money which must be paid down in good coin; as for the Puyfourcat inheritance, that seemed to him a pure Fata Morgana, a dictum which mortified terribly the peasant girl's love of lucre already so terribly tried, all the more because Valmajour, who had been much asked to swell drawing-rooms during the first winter, no longer set foot in a single house of the Faubourg St. *Germoyne.*

"So much the worse! I will work the harder, I will economize — *zou!*"

That energetic little Arlesian head-dress flew about in the great new building, ran up and down stairs, carrying from story to story her tale of adventure *wid* the Menister. She excited herself, squealed, pounced about, and then in a mysterious voice would say: "And *thin* there's the photograph," and with a furtive and sidelong glance, such as the sellers of photographs in the arcades employ when old libertines call for tights, she would show the picture:

"A pretty girl, at any rate! And you have read what is written there underneath?"

This kind of thing happened in the bosom of the temporary families and with the roller-skating ladies of the rink or at the Straw-Lair — ladies whom she pompously called Mme. Malvina or Mme. Éloïse, being deeply impressed by their velvet skirts, their chemises edged with holes for

ribbons and all the implements of their business, without bothering herself otherwise as to what that business might be. And thus the picture of this lovely creature, so distinguished and delicate, passed through these critical and curious defilements; they picked her to pieces; they read laughing the silly avowal of love, until the Provençal girl took her treasure back again and thrust it into the mouth of her money-bag with a furious gesture and in a strangled voice exclaimed:

"Well, I guess we have got them with that!"

Zou! off she flew to the bailiff — the bailiff for the affair of the skating-rink, the bailiff used to hunt Cadaillac, the bailiff for Roumestan. And as if that were not sufficient for her quarrelsome disposition, she had a host of troubles with janitors, the unending fight about the tabor-playing, which ended this time in the exile of Valmajour to one of those basements leased by a wine merchant where the sounding of hunting-horns alternate with lessons in kicking and boxing. From that time forth it was in this cellar, by the light of a gas jet which cost them so much per hour, and while looking about at the vests and fencing-gloves and copper horns hung on the wall, that the tabor-player passed his hours of exercise, pale and lonely like a captive, sending forth from below the pavement all kinds of variations on the shepherd's pipe, not at all unlike the mournful and piercing notes of a baker's cricket.

One day Audiberte received an invitation to

call upon the Commissary of Police in her quarter. She ran thither quickly, quite certain that it referred to her cousin Puyfourcat, and entered smiling with her head-dress tossing; but after a quarter of an hour she crept out, overwhelmed by a very peasant-like horror of the policeman, who, at his very first word, had forced her to deliver up the photograph and sign a receipt for ten thousand francs in which she absolutely renounced all and any suits at law. All the same she obstinately refused to leave, insisted upon believing in the genius of her brother and kept always alive in the depths of her memory the delicious astonishment caused one winter evening by that long file of carriages passing through the courtyard of the Ministry, where all the windows were alight.

When she came back she notified her two men, who were much more frightened than she was, that not another word was to be spoken about that business; but she never piped a word about the money. Guilloche, who suspected that there was some money, employed every means in his power to get a portion of it, and having obtained only the slenderest commission, felt a frightful rancor in regard to the Valmajours.

"Well," said he one morning to Audiberte while she was brushing on the staircase the finest clothes belonging to the musician, who was still in bed, "well, I hope you are satisfied at last. He is dead!"

"Who is dead?"

"Why, Puyfourcat, your cousin; it is in the paper."

She gave a screech, rushed into the apartment, calling aloud and almost in tears:

"Father! Brother! Hurry quick, the inheritance!"

As all of them clustered terribly moved and panting in a circle about that infernal fellow Guilloche, the latter slowly unfolded the *Journal Officiel* and in a very leisurely manner read to them as follows:

"'On this first day of October 1876, the Court at Mostaganem has ordered the publication and advertisement of the following inheritances at the order of the Ministry of the Interior. — Popelino (Louis), day-laborer — ' No, it is n't that one — 'Puyfourcat (Dosithée) — '"

"Yes, that 's him," said Audiberte.

The old bird thought it was necessary to wipe his eyes a bit.

"*Pécaïré!* Poor Dosithée — !"

"—— died at Mostaganem the 14th of January, 1874, born at Valmajour in the commune of Aps —"

In her eagerness and impatience the peasant girl asked:

"How much is it?"

"Three francs, thirty-five *cintimes!*" cried Guilloche in the voice of a fruit-peddler; and leaving in their hands the paper, in order that they might thoroughly verify the disappointment which had come to them, he flew off with a roar of

laughter which seemed infectious, for it rang from story to story down into the street and delighted all that great big village called Montmartre, where the legend of the Valmajours' inheritance had been widely circulated.

The inheritance from Puyfourcat, only three francs thirty-five! Audiberte pretended to laugh at it harder than the others, but the frightful desire for vengeance upon the Roumestans, who were in her eyes responsible for all their troubles, burned within her and now only increased in fury and looked about for some pretext or means, for the first weapon that lay to hand.

Most singular was the countenance of papa during this disaster. The while his daughter pined away with weariness and fury, and the captive musician became paler with every day passed in his cellar, papa, expanding like a rose, careless of what happened, did not even show his old professional envy and jealousy; he seemed to have arranged some quiet existence for himself outside and away from his family. Hardly had he stowed away the last mouthful of breakfast than off he went; and sometimes in the morning, when she was brushing his clothes, she noticed that a dried fig or a prune or some preserve or other would fall out of his pockets, and when she asked how they came there, the old fellow had one story or another for an explanation.

He had met a peasant woman from their country in the street, or he had run across a man from down there who was coming to see them.

Audiberte tossed her head: "*Avaï !* Wait till I follow you once!"

The truth was that while strolling about Paris the old man had discovered in the St. Denis quarter a big shop of food-stuffs, where he had entered, lured by the sign and by the temptations of the exotic shop-front, which was full of colored fruits and of silver and painted papers; it made a brilliant bit of color in the foggy, populous street. This shop, where he had ended by becoming a crony and friend of the family, was well known to Southerners quartered in Paris and had for its sign:

AUX PRODUITS DU MIDI.

"At the products of the South" — never was a sign more truthful. Everything in that shop was the product of the South, from the shopkeepers, M. and Mme. Mèfre, who were two products of the Fat South, having the prominent nose of Roumestan, the flaring eyes, the accent, the phrases and demonstrative welcome of Provence, down to their shop-boys, who were familiar and called people by their first names and did not hesitate in their guttural voices to call out to the desk: "I say, Mèfre, where did youse put the sausages?" — yes, down to the little Mèfre children, whining and dirty, who passed their lives amid a constant menace of being disembowelled or scalped or made into soup, but who nevertheless kept right on sticking their little dirty fingers into all the open barrels; nay, even to the buyers,

gesticulating and gossiping by the hour together in order at last to buy a *barquette* (boat shaped cake) for two cents, or taking their seats on chairs in a circle in order to discuss the merits of garlic sausage or of pepper sausage. Here one might listen to the "none the less, at least, come now, other ways" — the whole vocabulary, in fact, belonging to Aunt Portal, exchanged in the most noisy voices, whilst the "dear brother" in a dyed-over black coat, a friend of the family, haggled over some salt fish, and the flies, the vast horde of flies, drawn hither by all the sugar of these fruits and the candies and the almost Oriental pastries, buzzed and boomed right in the middle of the winter, kept alive by that steady heat. And when some busy Parisian grew impatient at the attendants all down at heel and the sublime indifference these shop people showed, continuing their gossip from one counter to the other whilst weighing and doing up things all wrong, it was a sight to see how that Parisian was put in his place by some remark uttered in the strongest country accent:

"*Té! vé!* if you are in a hurry the door is always open, you know, and the tram-cars are passing in front of the shop."

Father Valmajour was received with open arms by this gang of compatriots. M. and Mme. Mèfre remembered that they had seen him in the old time at the Fair of Beaucaire in a competition of tabor-players.

Between old people from the South that Fair at

Beaucaire, now no more and existing merely as a name, has remained like a Masonic bond of brotherhood. In our Southern provinces it was the fairy-tale for the whole year, the one distraction for all those narrow lives; people got ready for it a long time in advance, and for a long time after they talked about it. It formed a reward which could be promised to wife and children, and if it was not possible to take them along, one might bring them a bit of Spanish lace or a toy, which took little place in one's bag. The Beaucaire Fair, moreover, under pretext of business, meant a whole month or a fortnight at least of the free, exuberant and unexpected life of a camp of gypsies. One got a bed here or there from the citizens or in the shops or on top of desks, or else in the open street under the canvas hood of wagons or even below the warm light of the July stars.

O, for the business without the boredom of the shop, matters treated while one dines, or at the door in shirt sleeves, or at the booths ranged along the *Pré*, on the banks of the Rhône! The river itself was nothing but a moving fair-ground, supporting its boats of all shapes, its *lahuts*, lute shaped boats with lateen sails which came from Arles, Marseilles, Barcelona, the Balearic Islands, filled with wines, anchovies, oranges and cork, decorated with banners and standards and streamers which sounded in the fresh wind and reflected their colors in the swiftly flowing water. And what a clamor there was in that variegated crowd

of Spaniards, Sardinians, Greeks in long tunics and embroidered slippers, Armenians with their furred hats and Turks with their befrogged jackets, their fans and wide trousers of gray linen! All these were jammed together in the open-air restaurants, the booths for children's toys and canes and umbrellas, for jewelry and Oriental pastils and caps. And then to think of what was called the "fine Sunday," that is to say, the first Sunday after the opening of the fair — the orgies on the quays and the boats and in the famous restaurants, such as La Vignasse or the Grand Jardin or the Café Thibaut! Those who have once seen that fair have always felt a home-sickness for it to the end of their days.

One felt free and easy at the shop of the Mèfre couple, somewhat as at the Beaucaire Fair. And as a matter of fact, in its picturesque disorder the shop did resemble an improvised grand fair for the sale of foreign and southern products. Here all full and bending were sacks of meal in a golden powder, dried peas as big and hard as buck-shot and big chestnuts all wrinkled and dusty looking, like little faces of old female charcoal-burners; there stood jars of black and green olives preserved in the Picholini manner, tin cans of red oil with the taste of fruit, barrels of preserves from Apt made of melon rinds, of figs, of quinces and of apricots — all the remains of fruit from a fair dropped into molasses. Up there on the shelves among the salted goods and preserves, in a thousand bottles and a thousand

tin boxes, were the special relishes belonging to each city — the shells and little ships of Nîmes, the nougat of Montélimar, the ducklings and biscuits of Aix — all in gilded envelopes ticketed and signed.

Then there were the early vegetables, an outpouring of Southern gardens without shadows, in which the fruits hanging in slender green foliage have a factitious look of jewels — firm looking jujubes with a fine sheen of newly lacquered walnut side by side with pale azeroles, figs of every sort, sweet lemons, green or scarlet peppers, great big swelling melons, enormous onions with flowerlike hearts, muscat grapes with long berries so transparent that the flesh of them trembles like wine in a flask, rows of bananas striped black and yellow, regular landslides of oranges and pomegranates with their red gold tones, like little bombs made of red copper with their fuses issuing from a small crenelated crown. And finally, everywhere, on the walls and ceilings, on both sides of the door, in the tangle of burnt palms, chaplets of leeks and onions and dried carobs, packages of sausages, bunches of corn on the cob, there was a constant stream of warm hues, there was the entire summer, there was the Southern sunshine fastened up in boxes, sacks and jars radiating color out to the very sidewalk through the muddiness of the windows.

Old Valmajour would enter this shop with his nostrils dilated, quivering and most excited. This man, who refused the slightest work in the pres-

ence of his children and would wipe his brow for hours over a single button that he had to sew on his waistcoat, boasting of having accomplished a labor like one of "Caesar's," in this shop was always ready to lend a helping hand, throw off his coat to nail up or open cases, picking up here and there an olive or a bit of berlingot candy and lightening the labor with his monkey tricks and stories. On one day in the week, indeed, the day of the arrival of codfish *à la brandade*, he stayed very late at the store in order to aid them in sending out the orders.

Among them all this particular Southern dish, codfish *à la brandade*, could hardly be found elsewhere in Paris except at the *Produits du Midi;* but it was the true article, white, carded fine, creamy, with just a touch of garlic, the way it is done at Nîmes, from which city indeed the Mèfres had it forwarded. On Thursday evening it reaches Paris at seven o'clock by the lightning express and Friday morning it is distributed throughout the city to all the good customers whose names are on the big book of the store. Nay, it is on that very commercial ledger with its tumbled leaves, smelling of spices and soiled with oil, that is inscribed the history of the conquest of Paris by the Southerners; there appear one after the other all the big fortunes, political and industrial posts, names of celebrated lawyers, deputies, ministers, and among them all especially that of Numa Roumestan, the Vendean of the South, the pillar of the altar and the throne.

For the sake of that single line on which Roumestan's name is written the Mèfres would toss the whole book into the fire. He it is who represents best their ideas in religion, politics and everything. It is just as Mme. Mèfre says, and she is more enthusiastic than her husband:

"For that man, I tell you, anybody would imperil their eternal soul."

They are very fond of recalling the period when Numa, already on the road to fame, did not disdain to come there himself to buy his stores. And how he did understand the way of choosing by the touch a pasty! or a sausage that sweats nicely under the knife! Then such kind-heartedness! and that imposing, handsome face! and always a compliment for Madame, a pleasant word for his "dear brother," a caressing touch for the little Mèfres who accompanied him as far as the carriage bearing his parcels. Since his elevation to the Ministry, since those scoundrels of Reds had given him so much bother in the two Chambers, they did not see anything more of him, *pécaïré!* but he always remained faithful to the *Produits*, and it was always he who got the first distribution.

One Thursday evening about ten o'clock, when all the pots of codfish *à la brandade* had been wrapped and tied and placed in fine alignment on the counter, the whole Mèfre family, the shop boys, old Valmajour and all the products of the South were in full number on hand, perspiring and blowing. They were taking a rest with the peculiar air of people who have accomplished a

difficult task and were "dipping a bit" with lady-fingers and biscuits steeped in thick wine or orgeat syrup — "Come now, just something mild" — for as to anything strong, Southerners do not care for that at all. Among the townspeople as in the country parts drunkenness from alcohol is almost unknown. Instinctively this race has a fear and horror of it; it feels itself intoxicated from its birth — drunk without drinking.

For it is most certainly true that the wind and the sun distil for them a terrible kind of natural alcohol whose effect is felt more or less by all those born down there. Some of them have only that little drop too much which loosens the tongue and gestures and causes one to see life rosy in color and discover sympathetic souls everywhere, which brightens the eye, widens the streets, sweeps away obstacles, doubles audacity and strengthens the timid; others who are violently affected, like the little Valmajour girl or Aunt Portal, reach at any minute the limits of a stuttering, stammering and blind delirium. To understand it one must have seen our festivals in Provence with the peasants standing up on the tables yelling and pounding with their big yellow shoes, screaming: "Waiter, *dé gazeuse!*" (lemon soda) — an entire village raving drunk over a few bottles of lemonade. And where is the Southerner who has not experienced those sudden prostrations of the intoxicated, those breakings-down of the whole being, right on the heels of wrath or of enthusiasm — changes as sudden as a sunburst or a shadow across a March sky?

Without possessing the delirious Southern quality of his daughter, Father Valmajour was born with a pretty lively case of it. And that evening his ladyfingers dipped in orgeat affected him with a crazy jollity which made him reel off, standing with his glass in his hand and his mouth all twisted in the middle of the shop, all the farcical performances of an old sponge who pays his scot without money. The Mèfres and their shopmen were rolling around on the flour sacks with delight:

"*Oh! de ce Valmajour, pas moins!*" (O! that Valmajour, what a fellow he is!)

Suddenly the liveliness of the old fellow stopped short and his gesture, like that of a jumping-jack, was brought to a dead pause by the apparition before him of a Provençal head-dress trembling with rage.

"What are you doing here, father?"

Madame Mèfre raised her arms toward the sausages suspended from the ceiling:

"What! this is your young lady? And you have never told us about her! Well, how teeny-weeny she is! but a good girl, I'll be bound. Take a seat Miss, do!"

Owing as much to his habit of lying as to a desire to keep himself free, the old man had never spoken about his children, but had given himself out as an old bachelor who lived on his income; but among Southern people nobody is at a loss for one invention or another; if an entire caravan of little Valmajours had marched in on the heels of Audiberte the welcome would have

been just the same, just as warm and demonstrative; they rushed forward and made a place for her.

"*Différemment*, you must eat some dipped lady-fingers with us, too."

The Provençal girl stood embarrassed. She had just come from outside, from the cold and blackness of the night, a hard night of December, where the feverish life of Paris continued to pulsate in spite of the late hour and could be felt through the heavy fog torn in every direction by swiftly moving shadows, the colored lanterns of the omnibuses and the hoarse horns of the street cars; she arrived from the North, she arrived from winter, and then all of a sudden, without transition, she found herself in the midst of Italian Provence, in this shop of the Mèfres glowing just previous to Christmas with all kinds of toothsome and sun-filled articles, in the midst of the well-known accents and fragrances of home! It was her own country suddenly found again, a return to the motherland after a year of exile, of struggles and trials far away among the barbarians. A warmth gradually invaded her and slackened her nerves, the while she broke her *barquette* cake in a thimbleful of Carthagène and answered the questions of all this kindly set of people, as much at ease and familiar with her as if everybody had known each other for twenty years or more. She felt a return to her life and usual habits; tears rose to her eyes — those hard eyes with veins of fire which never wept.

The name "Roumestan" uttered at her side dried up this emotion suddenly. It came from Mme. Mèfre, who was looking over the addresses of her clients and was warning her shop-boys not to make any mistake and especially not to take the codfish *à la brandade* for Numa to Grenelle Street, but to the Rue de Londres.

"Seems as if codfish is not in the odor of sanctity in the Rue de Grenelle," remarked one of the cronies at the Products.

"Yes, indeed," said M. Mèfre. "The lady belongs up North — just as northerly as possible — uses nothing but butter in her kitchen, eh? — while in the Rue de Londres there 's the nicest kind of South, jollity, singing and everything cooked in oil — I understand why Numa enjoys himself most there."

So they were talking in the lightest of tones of this second household established by the Minister in a very convenient little house quite close to the railway station where he could repose after the fatigues of the Chamber, free from visitors and the greater botherations. You may be sure that the excitable Mme. Mèfre would have uttered fine screeches if just the same sort of thing had occurred in her family; but for Numa there was something very attractive and natural in it.

He loved the tender passion; but did n't all our kings, Charles X and Henry IV, play the gay Lothario? *Té! pardi!* He got that from his Bourbon nose.

And mixed in with this light tone, this air of

delight in spicy talk with which the South treats all affairs of the heart, there was a race hatred, the antipathy they felt against the woman of the North, the strange woman and her food cooked with butter. They grew excited, they went into a variety of *anédotes*, the charms of little Alice and her successes in grand opera.

"Why, I knew Mother Bachellery in the old time of the Fair at Beaucaire," said old Valmajour. "She used to sing ballads at the Café Thibaut."

Audiberte listened without breathing, never losing a single word and engraving in her mind names and addresses; her little eyes glittered with a diabolical intoxication in which the Carthagène wine had no part.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BABY CLOTHES.

AT the light knock heard on her chamber door Mme. Roumestan trembled as if she had been caught in a crime, and pushing in again the gracefully moulded drawer of her Louis XV bureau over which she had been leaning almost on her knees, she cried:

"Who 's there? What do you want, Polly?"

"A letter for Madame; there is great haste," answered the Englishwoman.

Rosalie took the letter and closed the door sharply. The writing was unknown and coarse, traced upon wretched paper, and there was the "urgent and personal" which accompanies begging letters. A Parisian chambermaid would never have disturbed her for such a little thing as that. She pitched it on the bureau, postponing the reading of it till later, and returned quickly to her drawer which contained the marvels of the baby's old layette. For the last eight years, ever since the tragedy, she had not opened it, fearing to find her tears there again; nor even since her new happiness had she done so owing to a very maternal superstition, fearing lest she should come to grief once more by means of a

premature caress given by way of its little layette to the child that was yet to come.

This courageous lady had all the nervous feelings of the woman, all her tremblings, all the shivery drawing-together of the mimosa. The world, which judges without understanding anything, found her cold, just as the dull and stupid suppose that flowers are not endowed with life. But now, her happiness having endured for six months, she must make up her mind to bring all these little articles out from their mourning and enclosure, shake out their pleats, go over and perhaps change them; for even in the case of baby clothes fashion changes and the ribbons are adjusted differently at different times. It was for this most intimate work that Rosalie had carefully locked herself in; throughout that big bustling Ministry, rustling with papers and humming with reports and the feverish flitting hither and thither from offices to departments, there was assuredly nothing quite so serious, nothing quite so moving as that woman on her knees before an open drawer, her heart beating and her hands trembling.

She took up the laces somewhat yellow with time which preserved along with the perfume all this white mass of innocent clothes — baby caps and undershirts arranged according to age and size, the gown for baptism, the robe full of little pleats and the doll stockings. She recalled her life down there at Orsay, gently languid and at work for hours together in the shadow of the big catalpa

whose white petals dropped into her work-basket among her spools and delicate embroidery scissors, her entire thought concentrated upon some one point of tailoring which gave her the measure of her dreams and the passage of time. What illusions she had then had, what belief and trust! What a delicious murmuring throughout the foliage above her head and what a rising up of tender and novel sensations in herself! In a single day life had suddenly taken all that from her. And so despair flowed back again to her heart as little by little she pulled forth the layette — the treason of her husband, the loss of her child.

The appearance of the first little dress all ready to be pulled on, that which is laid on the cradle at the moment of birth, the sleeves pushed one within the other, the arms spread apart, the little caps blown up to a round shape, made her burst into tears. It seemed to her that her child had lived and that she had known it and held it to her heart. A son, O, certainly it was a boy, a strong and beautiful one, and from his very birth he had the mysterious and deep eyes of his grandfather! To-day he would have been eight years old and have had long curls falling round his shoulders; at that age they still belong to the mother, who takes them walking, dresses them, makes them work. Ah, cruel, cruel life!

But after a while, as she pulled out and twitched into shape these little objects tied together with microscopic bows, with their embroidered flowers

and snowy laces, she began to be calm. Well, no; after all, life is not so evil, and while it lasts one must keep up one's courage. At that terrible turn of her life she had lost all of hers, imagining that the end had come, so far as she was concerned, for believing, loving, being wife and mother; thinking in fact that there only remained for her the pleasure of looking back upon the shining past and watching it disappear in the distance like some shore which one regrets to leave. Then after gloomy years the spring had shot out its fruits slowly beneath the cold snow of her heart; lo and behold, it flowered again in this little creature who was about to live and whom she felt was already vigorous from the terrible little kicks which it gave her during the night. And then her Numa, so changed, so good, quite cured of his brutality and violence! To be sure he still showed weaknesses which she did not like, those roundabout Italian ways which he could not help having, but, even as he said — "O, that? — that is politics!" Besides that, she was no longer the victim of the illusions of her early years; she knew that in order to live happily one must be contented with coming near to what one desires in everything and that complete happiness can only be quarried from the half-happinesses which existence affords us.

A new knock at the door. It is M. Méjean who would like to speak to Madame.

"Very good, I 'm coming."

She found him in the little drawing-room which

he was measuring from end to end with excited steps.

"I have a confession to make to you," said he, using a somewhat brusque tone of familiarity which their old friendship authorized and which both of them would have liked to have turned into a relationship of brother and sister. "Some days ago I put an end to this wretched affair — and did not withhold the statement from you for the sake of keeping this longer in my possession — "

He held out to her the portrait of Hortense obtained from Audiberte.

"Well, at last! O, how happy she is going to be, poor dear! "

She softened at the sight of her sister's pretty face, her sister sparkling with health and youth in that Provençal disguise, and read at the bottom of the picture in her fine and very firm writing: "I believe in you and I love you — Hortense Le Quesnoy." Then, remembering that the wretched lover had also read it and that he must have been intrusted with a very sorrowful commission in procuring it, she grasped his hand affectionately:

"Thank you."

"No, do not thank me, Madame. — Yes, it was hard — but for the last eight days I have lived with that 'I believe in you and I love you,' and at times I could imagine that it was meant for me." And then very low and timidly: "How is she getting on? "

"Oh, not well at all — Mamma is taking her South. Now she is willing to do whatever any-

body wishes — it is just as if a spring had broken in her."

"Altered?"

Rosalie made a gesture: "Ah!"

"Till we meet again, Madame," said Méjean very quickly, moving away with hurried steps; he turned back again at the door and squaring his solid shoulders beneath the half-raised curtain:

"It is the luckiest thing in the world that I have no imagination. I should be altogether too unhappy!"

Rosalie returned to her room deeply dejected. There was no use in fighting against it by recalling her sister's youth and the encouraging words of Jarras, who persisted in looking upon it merely as a crisis which it was necessary to cross; black thoughts invaded her which would not tally with the festive white in the baby's layette. She hastened to tie up, lay in order and turn the key upon these little scattered articles, and as she got up she perceived the letter lying on the bureau, took and read it mechanically, expecting to find the commonplace begging statement which she received every day from so many different hands, and which would have come at a lucky moment during one of those spells of superstition, when charity seems a bringer of good luck. That was why she did not understand it at first and was obliged to read again these lines, which had been written out as a copy by the ignorant pen of a schoolboy, the boy employed by Guilloche:

"If you are fond of codfish *à la brandade,*

delicious is that which is eaten to-night at the house of Mme. Bachellery in the Rue de Londres. Your husband pays for the supper. Ring three times and enter straight ahead."

From these foolish phrases, from this slimy and perfidious abyss, the truth arose and appeared to her, helped by coincidences and recollections — that name "Bachellery" pronounced so often during the past year, enigmatical articles in the papers concerning her engagement at the opera, that address which she had heard Numa himself give, and the long stay at Arvillard. In a second, doubt crystallized itself in her to certainty. And besides, did not the past throw a light for her upon this present and all its actual horror? Lies and grimace — he was not and could not be anything but that. Why should this eternal maker of dupes spare her? It was her fault; she had been the fool to allow herself to be caught by his lying voice and vulgar caresses. And in the same second certain details came to her mind which made her red and pale by turns.

This time it was no longer despair showing itself with heavy, pure tears as in the early deceptions, but anger against herself for having been so feeble and cowardly as to have been able to pardon him, and against him who had duped her in contempt of the promises and oaths in connection with the former crime. She would like to have convicted him of his villainy there, on the moment, but he was at Versailles in the Chamber of Deputies. It occurred to her to call Méjean,

but then she felt a repugnance to force that honest fellow to lie. And being thus reduced to crushing down a swarm of contrary feelings, prevent herself from crying out and surrendering to the terrible nerve-crisis which she felt rising in her, she strode to and fro on the carpet, her hands with a familiar action resting against the loosened waist of her dressing-gown. All of a sudden she stopped and shuddered, seized by a crazy fear.

Her child!

He was suffering too and he was calling to his mother with all the power of a life which is struggling to exist. Oh, my God, if he also, if he was going to die like the other one at the same age, and under exactly similar conditions! Destiny, which people call blind, has sometimes savage combinations, and she began to reason with herself in half-broken words and tender exclamations. "Dear little fellow! — poor little fellow! —" and attempted to look upon everything coldly as it exists, in order to conduct herself in a dignified way and above all not to destroy that solitary good thing which remained to her. She even took in hand some work, that embroidery of Penelope which the Parisian woman keeps about her, being always in action; for it was necessary to wait for Numa's return and have an explanation with him, or rather to discover in his attitude a conviction of his crime, before it came to the irremediable scandal of a separation.

O, those brilliant wools and that regular and colorless canvas — what confidences may they not

receive, what regrets, joys and desires form the complicated and knotted reverse of the canvas full of broken threads in these feminine products, with their flowers peacefully interwoven!

Coming back from the Chamber of Deputies, Numa Roumestan found his wife embroidering beneath the narrow gleam of a single lighted lamp, and this quiet picture, her lovely profile softened by her chestnut-colored hair, in that luxurious shade of cushioned furniture where the lacquer screens and old bronzes, the ivories and potteries, caught the warm and shooting rays from a wood fire, overcame him by contrast with the noise of the Assembly, where the brilliantly lighted ceilings are swathed in a dust full of movement that floats above the hall of debate like the smoke from powder above a field where military are manœuvring.

"How do you do, Mamma; it's pleasant here with you."

The day's meeting had been a hot one; always that wretched appropriation bill, and the Left fastened for five hours on the coat tails of that poor General d'Espaillon, who didn't know enough to put two ideas together when he was n't saying g — d —, etc., etc. Well, anyhow, the Cabinet would get through this time; but after the vacation at New Year's, when the Assembly would reach the question of the Fine Arts — then was the time to look out!

"They are counting very much on the Cadaillac business to upset me! . . . Rougeot is the one

who will talk . . . . He's no chicken, that Rougeot; he has a backbone!"

Then with his famous jerk of the shoulder: "Rougeot against Roumestan — the North against the South — all the better! It will amuse me. It will be a hand-to-hand fight."

Excited by his political matters, he talked on in a monologue without noticing how silent Rosalie was. Then he approached her and, sitting very near her on a footstool, made her stop her work by trying to kiss her hand.

"You seem to be in a terrible hurry with what you are embroidering. Is it for my New Year's present? I have bought yours. Just guess what it is!"

She pulled her hand gently away and looked him steadily in the face in an embarrassing manner without answering him. His features were drawn and weary from his days of work in the Assembly, showing that loosened look of the face and revealing in the corners of the eyes and the mouth a character at once weak and violent — all the passions and nothing to resist them. Faces down south are like the Southern landscape. It is better not to look at them unless the sun is shining.

"Are you dining at home?" asked Rosalie.

"No, I'm sorry to say — I'm expected at Durand's — a tiresome dinner — *té!* I'm already late," added he as he rose. "Luckily it is not necessary to dress there."

That fixed look in his wife's face followed

him. "Dine with me, I beg of you—" and her harmonious voice hardened into insistence and sounded threatening and implacable.

But Roumestan was no observer. "And besides, business is business, is it not so? O, this life of a public man cannot be arranged as one would wish!"

"Well then, goodbye," said she gravely, completing that farewell within her own mind with a "since it is our destiny."

She listened to the coupé roll off beneath the vaulted passage and then, having carefully folded up her work, she rang.

"A carriage, right away—a hackney-coach—and you, Polly, give me my mantle and bonnet—I 'm going out."

Quickly ready to start, she embraced in one look the chamber she was quitting, where she neither regretted anything nor left behind her any part of herself, for it was merely the room of a furnished apartment-house despite all the pomp of its cold yellow brocades.

"See that the big cardboard box is put in the carriage."

Of what belonged to both, the baby's layette was all that she carried off.

Standing at the door of the coach the mystified Englishwoman asked if Madame was not going to dine at home. No, she will dine at her father's where probably she will also pass the night.

On the way a doubt overcame her, or rather a scruple. Suppose nothing of all this were

true? Suppose that Bachellery girl did not live in the Rue de Londres. She gave the coachman the address, but without much hope; still, she must have certainty on this point.

The carriage stopped before a little house two stories high, crowned by a terrace for a summer garden; it was the old home in Paris of a Cairo man who had just died a bankrupt. There was about it the look of a little house with shutters closed and curtains drawn; a strong odor of the kitchen rose from the brightly lit and noisy basement. Rosalie understood what it was just from noting how the front door obeyed three strokes of the bell and of itself seemed to turn upon its hinges. A Persian tapestry caught up by heavy cords in the centre of the antechamber allowed a glimpse of the stair with its soft carpet and its lamps in which the gas was burning at the highest point. She heard laughter, took two steps forward and saw what never more in her life she could forget.

At the turn of the stairs on the first floor Numa was leaning over the banisters red and excited, in his shirt sleeves, with his arm round the waist of that girl, who was also very much excited, her hair loosened and falling down her back upon the frills of a rose-colored silk morning-gown. And there he was, calling out in his violent way:

"Bompard, bring up the *brandade!*"

That was where he could be seen as he really was, the Minister of Public Instruction and Religion, the great proclaimer of religious morality, the defender of sound doctrines! It was there he

"At the turn of the stairs on the first floor Numa was leaning over the banisters"

showed himself without mask or hypocritical grimace — all his South turned outside for inspection! — at ease and in his shirt-sleeves as if at the Fair of Beaucaire.

"Bompard, bring up the *brandade!*" repeated the giddy girl, intentionally exaggerating Numa's Provençal accent. Without a question that was Bompard, the improvised cookshop boy who came up from the kitchen, a napkin over his shoulder and his arms surrounding a great big dish. It was he who caused the sounding wing of the door to turn on its hinges.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

"GENTLEMEN of the Central Administration!"

"Directors of the Academy of the Fine Arts!"

"Gentlemen of the Academy of Medicine!"

In grand gala dress, with his short hose and sword by his side, the chamberlain was announcing the arrivals in a mournful voice that resounded through the solemn drawing-rooms. As he called out, lines of black coats crossed the immense hall all red and gold and ranged themselves in a half-circle before the Minister, who stood with his back to the chimneypiece, having near him his Under-Secretary of State, M. de la Calmette, and his chief of cabinet, his foppish attachés and a few directors belonging to the Ministry such as Dansaert and Béchut. His Excellency addressed compliments and congratulations for the decorations and academic palms granted to some of those present, according as each organization arrived and was presented by its dean or president; then the organization turned right about and gave way to another set, some bodies retiring whilst others arrived, causing no little confusion at the doors of the hall.

For it was late; it was past one o'clock and each man was thinking of the breakfast which was waiting for him at home. In the concert hall which had been turned into a vestiary, impatient groups were looking at their watches, buttoning their gloves, adjusting their white cravats below their drawn faces; gaping and weariness, bad temper and hunger were on every side. Roumestan himself felt the weariness of this important day. He had lost his fine warmth of spirit shown at the same time last year, his faith in the future and in reform, and he let his little speeches off slowly, pierced through to his very marrow by the cold, despite the radiators and the enormous flaming wood fire; indeed, that little flaky snow which whirled about the panes of the windows seemed to fall upon his light heart and congeal it even as it fell upon the greensward of the garden.

"Gentlemen of the Comédie-Française!"

Closely shaved and solemn, distributing bows just as the fashion was in the grand epoch, they posed themselves in majestic attitudes about their dean, who in a cavernous voice presented the company, talked about the endeavors and vows the company had made — "the" company, without any epithet or qualifying word, just as we say "God" or as we say "the" Bible — exactly as if no other company existed in the world except that alone! And it must be said that poor Roumestan needs be very much enfeebled if this same company could not excite his eloquence and grand theatrical phrases, this company to which he him-

self seemed to belong with his bluish chin, his jowls and his distinguished but most conventional poses!

The fact was that for the last eight days, since the departure of Rosalie, he was like a gambler who has lost his mascot; he was frightened and suddenly felt himself inferior to his fortune and thus ready to be crushed. Mediocrities who have been favored by chance have such panics and nervous crises and they were increased in him by the terrible scandal which was about to break out, the scandal of a lawsuit for separation which the young wife insisted upon absolutely, notwithstanding all his letters and visits, his grovelling prayers and oaths. To keep up appearances it was said at the Ministry that Mme. Roumestan had gone to live with her father because of the near departure of Mme. Le Quesnoy and Hortense. But nobody was taken in by that, and the luckless man saw his adventure reflected in pity or curiosity or sarcasm from all these faces which were defiling before him, as well as from certain broadly marked smiles and from various shakes of the hand, a little more energetic than usual. There was not a single one of the lowest employees who had come to the reception in jacket and overcoat who was not thoroughly posted in this matter. Among the offices couplets were circulating from mouth to mouth in which Chambéry rhymed with Bachellery; more than one porter discontented with his pay was humming one of these couplets within himself whilst making a deep bow to his supreme chief.

Two o'clock! Still the organized bodies kept presenting themselves and the snow kept deepening whilst the man with the chains over his uniform introduced pell-mell and without any kind of order:

"Gentlemen of the School of Laws!"

"Gentlemen of the Conservatory of Music!"

"Directors of the Subsidized Theatres!"

By favor of seniority and his three failures Cadaillac arrived at the head of this delegation. Roumestan longed far more to fall with fist and foot upon the cynical *impresario* whose nomination had occasioned such serious embarrassment to him than to listen to the fine speech to which the ferocious insolence of his look gave the lie and to answer him with a forced compliment, half of which stuck in the big folds of his cravat:

"Greatly touched, gentlemen . . . *mn mn mn* . . . progress of art . . . *mn mn mn* . . . still better in the future. . ."

And the *impresario* as he moved off:

"Poor old Numa — he 's got a charge of lead in his wing this time!"

When these had left, the Minister and his comrades did honor to the usual breakfast; but this meal which had been so gay and full of effusion the year before was weighted down by the gloom of the chief and bad temper on the part of his intimates, who were all of them enraged with him on account of their own situations which he had already begun to compromise. This scandalous lawsuit coming just in the midst of the debate over

Cadaillac would be sure to make Roumestan impossible as a member of the cabinet. That very morning at the reception in the Palace of the Élysées the Marshal had said two words about it with the laconic and brutal eloquence natural to an old cavalryman: "A dirty business!"

Without precisely having heard this speech from an august mouth, which was murmured in Numa's ear in an alcove, the gentlemen round him saw very clearly their own fall coming behind that of their chief.

"Oh, women, women!" grunted the learned Béchut over his plate. M. de la Calmette with his thirty years of official life grew melancholy as he pondered over a retiring from office like unto Tircis, and below his breath the long-legged Lappara amused himself by frightening Rochemaure out of his wits:

"Viscount, we must look out for ourselves; we shall be decapitated before eight days are over!"

After a toast had been given by the Minister to the New Year and his dear collaborators, uttered with a shaky voice in which one heard the tears, they separated. Méjean, who stayed to the last, walked two or three times up and down beside his friend without having the courage to say a single word; then he too left. Notwithstanding his wish to keep by his side during that day a man like Méjean whose straightforward nature forced his respect like a reproach uttered by his own conscience, but at the same time sustained and reassured him, Numa could not stand in the way of Méjean's duty,

which was to run his round of visits and distribute good wishes and presents for the New Year, any more than he could prevent his chamberlain from going back to his family and unburdening himself of his sword and short-clothes.

What a howling solitude was that Ministry! It was like Sunday in a factory with the boiler cold and silent. In all the departments upstairs and downstairs, in his own cabinet, where he vainly attempted to write, in his bed-chamber, which he began once more to fill with his sobs, everywhere that little January snow was whirling about the big windows, veiling the horizon and increasing the silence which was like that of the Eastern steppes.

Oh, the misery of men in lofty positions!

A clock struck four and then another answered and then still others replied through the vast desert of the palace until it seemed as if there was nothing alive there except the hour. The idea of remaining there till evening face to face with his wretchedness frightened him. He felt that he must thaw himself a little with a bit of friendship and tenderness. Steam radiators and warm-air registers and half trees flaming in the chimney-piece did not constitute a hearth; for a moment he thought of the Rue de Londres. But he had sworn to his lawyer — for the lawyers were already at work — to keep quiet until the suit was decided. All of a sudden a name flashed across his mind: "Bompard! Why had he not come?" Generally he was observed to arrive the first on mornings of feast-days, his arms full of bouquets and paper

sacks with candies for Rosalie, Hortense and Mme. Le Quesnoy, wearing on his lips a smile which expressed his character of grandpapa or of Santa Claus. Of course Roumestan paid the bill of these surprises, but friend Bompard was possessed of imagination enough to forget that fact, and, notwithstanding her antipathy, Rosalie could not help being touched when she thought of the privations which the poor devil must have undergone in order to be so generous.

"Suppose I go and get him and we dine together."

He was reduced to that. He rang, took off his evening dress, all his medals and orders and went out on foot by the Rue Bellechasse.

The quays and bridges were all white; but when he had crossed the courtyard of the Carrousel neither ground nor air betrayed a trace of snow. It disappeared under the wheels that crowded the street, in the swarming myriads of the mob covering the sidewalks at the shop-fronts and pushing round the offices of the omnibus lines. This tumult of a feast-day evening, the calls of the coachmen, the shrill cries of peddlers in the luminous confusion of the shop-fronts, where the lilac-colored jets from the Jablochkoff burners extinguished the twinkling yellow of the gas and the last reflections from the pale afternoon, lulled the despair of Roumestan and dissolved it, as it were, by means of the agitation of the street. Meantime he directed his steps toward the Boulevard Poissonnière where the old Circassian, very seden-

tary like all men of imagination, had lived for the last twenty years, in fact since his arrival in Paris.

Nobody had ever seen the interior of Bompard's home, of which nevertheless he talked a good deal, as well as of his garden and his artistic furniture, to complete which he haunted all the auctions at the Hôtel Drouot.

"Do come to breakfast one of these days and eat a chop with me!"

That was the regular form of invitation which he scattered right and left, but any one who took him at his word never found anybody at home; he came up standing against signs left by the janitor, against bells wrapped in paper or deprived of their wire. During an entire year Lappara and Rochemaure obstinately continued to try to reach Bompard's rooms and overcome the extraordinary stratagems of the Provençal who was guarding the mystery of his apartment — but all in vain. One day he even took out some of the bricks near the front door in order to be able to say across this species of barricade to the friends he had invited:

"Awfully sorry, dear boys — we have had an escape of gas — everything blown up last night!"

After having mounted numberless stories and wandered through long corridors, tumbled over invisible steps and intruded upon veritable assemblies of witches among the servants' bedrooms, Roumestan, quite blown from that arduous ascent, to which his legs of an illustrious man were no

longer equal, tumbled against a great big wash-bowl fastened to the wall.

"Who's there?" spoke out a well-known voice coming from far down the throat.

The door opened slowly, weighed down by a clothes-rack upon which hung the entire wardrobe of the lodger for winter and summer; the room was small and Bompard did not lose the benefit of an eighth of an inch and was compelled to keep his toilet table in the corridor. His friend found him lying on a little iron bed, his brow decorated with a scarlet head-dress, a sort of Dantesque cap which rose up in astonishment at sight of the distinguished visitor.

"It can't be you!"

"Are you ill?" said Roumestan.

"Ill? not much!"

"Then what are you doing here?"

"You see I am taking stock of things," and then he added, to explain his thought: "I have so many plans in my head, so many inventions! Now and then I get dispersed and lose myself; it is only when I lie abed that I can gather myself together a little."

Roumestan looked about for a chair, but none was there except the single one in use as a night table; it was covered with books and newspapers and had a candlestick wobbling on top of them all. He sat down on the foot of the bed.

"Why do we never see anything more of you?"

"Pshaw! you must be joking. After what

happened I could not meet your wife face to face. Just think a little! There I was right before her, the codfish *à la brandade* in my hand. It took a mighty lot of coolness, I can tell you, not to let everything drop."

"Rosalie is no longer at the Ministry," said Numa quite overwhelmed.

"You astonish me; do you mean to say that it has not been arranged?"

And indeed it did not seem possible to him that Madame Numa, a person of so much good sense . . . for after all, what was all this business anyhow? "Come now, just a mere fancy!"

The other interrupted him:

"You don't understand her — she is an implacable woman — the perfect image of her father — Northern race, my dear fellow — with them it is not as it is with us, where the greatest anger evaporates in gesticulations and threats and then there is nothing left and we face about. But they keep everything in mind; it is terrible."

He did not say that she had already forgiven him once before; and then, in order to escape from his sorrowful thoughts:

"Get your clothes on; you must come and dine with me."

While Bompard was making his toilet out in the corridor the Minister looked about the mansard room lit by a little window like a tobacco-box, over which the melting snow was running. Pity seized him face to face with this penury, these damp rags, the whitewashed paper and little stove

worn with rust and fireless notwithstanding the cold. And he asked himself, used as he was to the sumptuousness of his palace, how people could live in such a place?

"Have you seen the *gardeen?*" cried Bompard joyfully from his basin.

His garden was the leafless tops of three plane-trees which could not be seen unless one stood upon the solitary chair in the room.

"And my little museum?"

His museum he called a few ticketed knick-knacks upon a board, a brick, a short pipe in brierwood, a rusty knife-blade and an ostrich egg — but the brick came from the Alhambra, the sword had been used in the vendettas of a famous Corsican bandit, the short pipe bore an inscription, "Pipe of a Morocco criminal," and finally the ostrich egg represented the vanishing of a beautiful dream, all that remained — along with a few laths and bits of plaster heaped in a corner — of the famous Bompard Incubator and the scheme for artificial hatching. But now, my dear boy, there is something much better on hand — a marvellous scheme — millions in it — which he was not at liberty to explain at present.

"What is it you are looking at? That? — That is my brevet of membership — *bé*, yes, membership in the Aïoli."

This club of the Aïoli had for its purpose the bringing together once a month of all the Southerners living in Paris, in order to eat a dinner

cooked with garlic, a way of never losing either the fragrance or the accent of home. It was a tremendous organization — a President of Honor, Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Seniors, Questors, Treasurers, all furnished with their diplomas as members brave with silver streamers, and the flower of the leek as decoration upon rose-colored paper. This precious document was displayed on the wall alongside of advertisements of every sort of color, sales of houses, railway placards and so forth, which Bompard liked to have always under his nose, in order, as he ingenuously remarked, "to do his liver good." There might one read: "Château to sell, one hundred and fifty hectares, meadows, hunting, river, pond full of fish . . . Lovely little property in Touraine, vineyards, luzernes, mill-on-the-Cize . . . Round trip through Switzerland, through Italy, to Lago Maggiore, to the Borromean Islands . . ." These things excited him just as much as if he had had fine landscapes in oil hanging on the wall. He believed he was in these places — and he was there!

"By Jove!" said Roumestan with a shade of envy of this wretched believer in chimeras, so happy in his rags — "You have a tremendous imagination. Come, are you ready? Let's get down. It is frightfully cold up here."

After a few turns through the brilliant streets across the jolly mob of the boulevards the two friends settled themselves down in the heady, radiating warmth of a little room in a big restau-

rant, in front of oysters and a bottle of Château-Yquem very carefully uncorked.

"To your health, my comrade — I pray that it may be good and happy forever."

"*Té!* why it's a fact," said Bompard; "we have n't kissed each other yet."

Across the table they gave each other a hug with moistened eyes and Roumestan felt himself quite gay again, despite the wrinkled and swarthy hide of the Circassian. Ever since morning he had wanted to kiss somebody. Besides, think of all the years they had known each other — thirty years of their life in front of them on that table-cloth — and through the vapor rising from delicate dishes and over the straw wrappers of delicious wines they recalled their days of youth, their fraternal recollections, races and picnics, saw once more their own boyish faces and interlarded their effusions with words in dialect which brought them still closer together.

"*T'en souvénès, digo?*" (I say, do you remember?)

In a room near by could be heard a noise of high laughter and little screams.

"To the devil with females," said Roumestan; "there is nothing worth while but friendship!"

And then they drank to each other once more; nevertheless their talk turned in another direction: "And how about the little girl?" asked Bompard, winking his eye. "How is she getting on?"

"O, of course, I have not seen her again, you know."

"Of course not, of course not," said the other turning suddenly very serious and putting on a solemn face.

Presently a piano behind the partition began to play scraps of waltzes, fashionable quadrilles and bars of music from operettas, now crazy and now languid. They stopped talking in order to listen, pulling off the withered grapes, and Numa, all of whose sensations appeared to have two faces and to be swung upon a pivot, began to think about his wife and his child and his lost happiness. So he must needs unbosom himself at the top of his voice with his elbows on the table.

"Eleven years of intimacy, trust and tenderness — all that flashed away and vanished in a minute! how can it be possible? ah, Rosalie, Rosalie — "

No one could ever know what she had been to him, and he himself had not thoroughly understood it until after her departure. Such an upright spirit, such a straightforward heart! And what shoulders and what arms! No little gingerbread doll like little Bachellery; something full and amber-tinted and delicate —

"Besides, don't you see, my dear comrade, there's no denying that when we are young we need surprises and adventures — meetings in a hurry, sharpened by the fear of being caught, staircases one comes down on all fours with one's boots in one's arms — all that is part of love. But at our age what we desire above everything

else is peace and what the philosophers call security in pleasure. It is only marriage which can give you that."

He jumped up all of a sudden, threw down his napkin: "Off with us, *té!*"

"And we are going — ?" asked the impassible Bompard.

"To walk by under her window just as I did twelve years ago — to this, my dear boy, is he reduced, the grand Master of the University — "

Under the arcaded way of the Place Royale, whose square garden covered with snow formed a white quadrilateral within its iron fence, these two friends walked up and down for a long while, spying out in the broken sky-line formed by the Louis XIII roofs, chimneys and balconies the lofty windows of the Hôtel Le Quesnoy.

"To think that she is over there," sighed Roumestan, "so near to me, and yet I may not see her!"

Bompard was shivering with his feet in the mud and did not appreciate very greatly this sentimental excursion; in order to bring it to a close he used strategy, and knowing well that Numa was a soft one, in deadly fear of the slightest illness:

"I 'm afraid you 'll catch cold, Numa," insinuated he like the traitor he was.

The Southerner was struck with fear, and they quickly returned to the carriage.

She was there indeed, in that same drawing-room where he had seen her for the first time.

The furniture was just the same and held the same place, having reached that age when furniture, like temperaments, cannot be renewed. Scarcely were there a few more faded folds in the fawn-colored hangings and a film over the dull reflections from the mirrors like that one sees on deserted ponds which nothing ever touches. The faces of the two old people under the two-branched candlesticks at the card-table in company with their usual partners showed likewise a little of the wear and tear of life. Madame Le Quesnoy's features were puffy and drooping as if the fibre had been taken out of them, and the President's pallor was still more pallid and still prouder was the revolt that he preserved in the bitter blue of his eyes. Seated near a big arm-chair, the cushions of which were still crushed down by a light weight, her sister having gone to bed, Rosalie continued in a low voice that reading aloud which she had been giving a moment before for the benefit of her sister, reading on in a low voice through the silence of whist broken by the half-words and interjections of the players.

It was a book belonging to her youth, one of those poets of nature whom her father had taught her to love. And she perceived the whole past of her life as a young girl rising up from the pure white of the stanzas as well as the fresh and penetrating impression of the books one has read first in life.

La belle aurait pu sans souci
Manger ses fraises loin d'ici
Au bord d'une claire fontaine
Avec un joyeux moissonneur
Qui l'aurait prise sur son cœur,
Elle aurait eu bien moins de peine.

(In happy ease that damsel fair
Her berries might have eaten where
A fountain plashes o'er a stone;
Some harvester at noontide rest
Had clasped her to his stalwart breast —
Ah! far less woe would she have known.)

The book slipped from her hands upon her knees, the last two lines re-echoing their mournful song to the very depths of her being, recalling to her the wretchedness which for one moment she had forgot. There lies the cruelty that poets exercise; they lull and appease you, but then with one word they envenom again the wound which they were by way of healing.

She saw herself as she was in that same place twelve years before when Numa paid his addresses to her with great big bouquets of roses; when, clothed with her twenty years and the wish to be beautiful for his sake, from that very window she watched him coming, just as one watches one's own destiny. In every corner of the house there remained echoes of his warm and tender voice, so ready to lie. If one looked a moment among the music scattered about the piano one would find the duos which they sang together; everything which surrounded her seemed accomplices of the

disaster in her failure of a life. She thought of what that life might have been by the side of an honest man and loyal comrade, not brilliant and ambitious, but enjoying a simple and hidden existence in which they would have courageously borne all bitternesses and all sorrow to the very end of their days.

"*Elle aurait eu bien moins de peine.*" (Ah, far less woe would she have known.)

She had plunged so deep into her dream that when the whist party ended and her parents' old friends had left, almost without her remarking it, answering mechanically the friendly and pitying farewells that each one gave her, she failed to perceive that the President, instead of conducting his friends to the front door as had been his habit every evening, no matter what the time or season, was marching up and down the drawing-room. At last he stopped before her and put a question to her in a voice which caused her all of a sudden to tremble:

"Well, my child, where are you in this matter? have you made up your mind?"

"Why, dear father, I am exactly where I was before."

He seated himself beside her, took her hand and attempted to do the persuasive:

"I have been to see your husband . . . he consents to everything . . . you can live here with me the entire time that your mother and sister shall be away, and even afterwards if your anger against him still continues. But I tell you again, this

suit for separation is impossible! I do hope that you will not insist upon it."

Rosalie tossed her head.

"My dear father, you do not understand that man. He will employ all his cunning to surround me and get me back again, make me his dupe, a voluntary dupe, who has accepted an undignified and degraded existence. Your daughter is not a woman of that sort. I demand a complete and irreparable rupture, openly announced to all the world."

From the card-table where she sat ranging the cards and markers Mme. Le Quesnoy, without turning round, gently interposed:

"Forgive, my child, forgive."

"O yes, that is easy to say when one has a husband as upright and loyal as yours, when one never has known the suffocating effect of lies and treason, drawing their plots about one. He is a hypocrite, I tell you. He has his Chambéry morality and his morality of the Rue de Londres. His words and his acts are never in accord — two ways of speech, two faces — all the seductive and catlike nature of his race — in a word, the man of the South!"

And then, losing her head as her anger exploded, she said:

"Besides, I had already forgiven him once. Yes, two years after my marriage. I never told you about it, I have never spoken to a single person. I was very unhappy; and then we only remained together because of an oath he made

me. — But he only lives on perjuries! And now it is completely at an end, completely at an end!"

The President did not insist further, but slowly rose and went over to his wife. There was a whispering together and something like a debate, surprising enough between that authoritative man and this humble, annihilated creature: "You must tell her. . . . Yes, yes, I want you to tell her. . . ." Without adding another word M. Le Quesnoy left the room and his sonorous regular step, his step of every evening, could be heard mounting the solitary vaulted stairs, through all the solemn spaces of the grand drawing-room.

"Come here," said her mother to the daughter with a tender gesture, "nearer to me, still nearer."

She would never dare to tell her aloud; and even when they were so close and heart was beating against heart, she still hesitated:

"Listen, dear; it is he who demands it — he wants me to tell you that your destiny is the destiny of all women, and that even your mother has not escaped it."

Rosalie was overwhelmed with that secret confided to her which she had divined in a flash at the first words of her mother, whilst her old and very dear voice broken with tears could hardly articulate the very sorrowful, very sorrowful story, similar in every way to her own — the crime of her husband from the earliest years of their housekeeping, just as if the motto of these wretched coupled beings must be "Deceive me or else I deceive thee!"

—the man hastening to begin the evil in order to maintain his superior rank.

"Enough, enough, Mamma. Oh, how you are hurting me!"

This father whom she so admired, whom she placed far above any other man, this sterlingly honest and firm magistrate! But what kind of creatures were men, anyhow? At the North and down South, all were alike, traitors and perjurers. She who had not wept a tear because of the treason of her husband now felt herself invaded by a flood of hot tears because of this humiliation of her father. . . . And so they were counting upon this, were they? to make her yield! No, a hundred times no; she would never forgive. Ha, ha! so that was marriage, was it? Very well; dishonor and disdain upon marriage then! What cared she for fear of scandal and the proprieties of the world, since it was a rivalry as to who should treat them with the most contempt?

Her mother, taking her in her arms and pressing her against her heart, endeavored to soften the revolt of this young conscience wounded in all its beliefs, in its dearest superstitions; she caressed her gently as if she were rocking a child:

"Yes, yes, you will forgive. You will do as I did—you see it is our destiny. Ah, I also had a terrible bitterness in me during the first moments and a great longing to throw myself out of the window. But I thought of my child, my poor little Andrew who was just coming to life, who since then grew up and died, loving and re-

specting all his family. So you too will pardon in order that your child shall have the same happy tranquillity which my own courage secured to you, so that he shall not be one of those half-orphans whom parents share between them, whom they bring up in hatred and disdain to one and the other. You will also remember that your father and mother have already suffered tremendously and that other bitter sorrows are menacing them now — "

She stopped short, suffocated by feeling, and then in a solemn accent:

" My daughter, all sorrows become softened and all wounds are capable of being cured. There is only one sorrow which is irreparable and that is the death of the person we love."

In the failure of her agitated forces that followed these last words Rosalie felt the figure of her mother grow in grandeur by as much as her father had lost greatness in her eyes. She even reproached herself for having so long misunderstood the sublime and resigned self-abnegation concealed beneath that apparent feebleness which was the result of bitter blows. Thus it came about that for her mother's sake, for her mother's sake alone, she renounced the lawsuit in revenge of her outraged rights, and renounced it in gentle words, almost as if asking pardon: " Only do not insist that I go back to him — I should be too ashamed. I will accompany my sister to the South. Afterwards, later, we shall see."

The President came back again, and when he saw

the enthusiasm with which the old mother was throwing her arms about the neck of her child he understood that their cause was won.

"Thank you, my daughter," he murmured, very much touched. Then after a little hesitation he approached Rosalie for the usual kiss of good-night. But the brow which ordinarily was so tenderly offered moved aside and his kiss lost itself in her hair.

"Good-night, father."

He said nothing in return, but went away hanging his head with a convulsive shudder in his high shoulders. He who during his life had accused so many people, had condemned so many — he, the First Magistrate of France, had found a judge in his turn.

CHAPTER XIX.

HORTENSE LE QUESNOY.

THROUGH one of those sudden shiftings of the scenery which are so frequent in the comedy of Parliamentary government, the meeting of January 8th, during which it was to be expected that the good luck of Roumestan would go all to pieces, procured for him on the contrary a striking success. When he marched up the steps of the platform in order to answer the cruel sarcasms that Rougeot had been getting off concerning the management of the opera, the mess that the department of the fine arts had got into, the emptiness of those reforms which had been trumpeted abroad by the supporters of the clerical Ministry, Numa had just learned that his wife had left Paris, having renounced her lawsuit.

This happy news, which was known to him alone, filled his answer with a confidence that radiated from his whole being. He took a haughty air, then a confidential, then a solemn one; he alluded to calumnies which are whispered in people's ears and to some scandal that was expected:

"Gentlemen, there will be no scandal!"

The tone with which he said this threw a lively disappointment over the galleries crammed with

all the sensation-loving, pretty women, mad for strong emotions, who had come there in charming costumes to see the conqueror devoured. The interpellation by Rougeot was torn to bits, the South seduced once more the North, Gaul for yet another time was conquered! — and when Roumestan ran down the steps again, worn out, perspiring and almost without voice, he had the proud satisfaction of seeing his party — but a moment ago so cold and even hostile — and his colleagues in the Cabinet, who had been accusing him of having compromised them, surround him with acclamations and enthusiastic flatteries. And in the intoxication of his success the relinquishment of her vengeance on the part of his wife kept returning to him always in the light of a supreme salvation.

He felt himself relieved and gay and expansive, so much so that on returning to the city the thought passed through his mind to run around to the Rue de Londres. O, of course, entirely as a friend! in order to reassure that poor little girl who had been as anxious as he over the results of the interpellation, who bore their common exile with so much bravery, sending him in her unformed writing, dryed with face-powder, delightful little letters in which she related her existence day by day and exhorted him to patience and prudence.

"No, no; do not come here, poor darling — write to me and think of me — I shall be brave."

It happened that the Opera was not open that evening, and during the short passage from the station to the little house in the Rue de Londres

Numa was thinking, while he clutched in his hand that little key which had been a temptation to him more than once for the last fortnight:

"How happy she is going to be!"

Having opened the door and shut it noiselessly, he suddenly found himself in deep obscurity, for the gas had not been lit. This neglect gave to the little house an appearance of mourning and widowhood which flattered him. The thick carpet on the stair softening his tread as he ran up, he reached without being in any way announced the drawing-room hung with Japanese stuffs of the most deliciously false shades just suited to the artificial gold in the tresses of the little girl.

"Who is there?" asked a pretty voice but an angry one from the divan.

"It is I, by Jove! —"

He heard a cry and a sudden springing up, and in the uncertain light of the evening by the white light of her skirts, the little singing girl stood up straight in the greatest fright, whilst handsome Lappara in a crushed but motionless position stood there looking hard at the flowers in the carpet to avoid the eyes of his master. There was no denying the situation.

"Gutter-snipes!" roared Roumestan hoarsely, seized by one of those suffocating rages during which the beast growls inside the man with a desire to tear in pieces and to bite far more than to strike.

Without knowing how it was he found himself outside the house, hurried away by fear of his own

frightful wrath. In that very place and at that very hour some days before, his wife, just like himself, had received the blow of treachery, the vulgar and the outrageous wound, but a far more cruel and utterly unmerited one. But he never thought of that for a moment, filled as he was with indignation at the personal injury. No, never had such a villainy been seen beneath the sun! This Lappara whom he loved like a child! This scoundrel of a girl for whose sake he had gone the length of compromising his entire political fortune!

"Gutter-snipes! — gutter-snipes!" he repeated aloud in the empty street as he hurried through a fine, penetrating rain, which in fact calmed him far better than the finest logic.

"*Té!* why, I am all wet —"

He hurried to the cab-stand on the Rue d'Amsterdam, and in the crowd which collects in that place owing to the constant arrival of trains at the station he came up against the hard and tightly buttoned uniform of General the Marquis d'Espaillon.

"Bravo, my dear colleague! I was not in the Chamber; but they tell me that you charged the enemy like a —— and routed him, horse and foot."

As he stood as straight as a lath under his umbrella, the old fellow had a devilish lively eye and moustaches gallantly twisted to the correct angle for the evening of a lucky love adventure.

"G— d— m— s—!" he went on, leaning over toward Numa's ear with a tone of confidence in gallantry, "you at least can boast of understanding women, by Jove!"

And as the other looked at him sharply, supposing that he was speaking sarcastically:

"Why yes, don't you remember our discussion about love? You were perfectly right. It is not only the fops and dudes that please the women — I've got one now on the string. Never swallowed a better than this one — G— d— m— s—, not even when I was twenty-five and had just left the Academy."

Roumestan listened to him with his hand on the door of his cab and thought that he was smiling at the old lovesick fool, but what he produced was nothing more than a horrible grimace. His theories about women were just then so extraordinarily upset. — Glory? genius? O, come now! Those are not the things that make them care for you. He felt himself outwitted and disgusted, and had a desire to weep and then a longing to sleep in order not to think any more, especially not to recall further the frightened laugh of that little rascally girl standing straight before him with her waist in disorder and all her neck red and trembling from the interrupted kisses.

But in the agitated course of our life, hours and events link themselves together and follow each other like waves. In place of the nice rest which he hoped to obtain on returning home a new blow was awaiting him at the Ministry, a telegraphic despatch which Méjean had opened in his absence and now handed him, deeply moved:

Hortense dying. She wishes to see you. Come quickly.

WIDOW PORTAL.

The whole of his frightful egotism broke from him with the dismayed exclamation:

"Oh, what devoted fidelity am I losing in her!"

Then he thought of his wife who was present at that death-bed and had allowed Aunt Portal to send the despatch. Her wrath had not yielded and probably never would give way. Nevertheless, if she had been willing, how thoroughly would he not have recommenced life at her side, giving up all his imprudent follies and becoming a straightforward and almost austere family man! And then, never giving a thought to the harm that he had done, he reproached Rosalie for her hardness of heart, as if she were treating him unjustly.

He passed the night correcting the proofs of his speech and interrupting work every now and then to write bits of letters to that little scoundrel of an Alice Bachellery, letters either raging or sarcastic, scolding or abusive. Méjean was also up all night in the Secretary's office; overwhelmed with bitter sorrow, he tried to find forgetfulness in unremitting toil, and Numa, who was pleased with his company, experienced a veritable pain because he could not pour out to him in confidence the deception he had met with. But then he would have been forced to acknowledge that he had gone back to her and stand the ridicule of the situation.

Nevertheless, he was not able to hold out, and in the morning whilst his chief of cabinet was accompanying him to the station he committed to

him amongst other orders the charge of giving Lappara his walking-papers. "O, he is expecting it, you may be sure! I caught him in the very act of committing the blackest piece of ingratitude. — And when I think how kind I have been to him, to the point of intending to make him — " he stopped short; would it be believed that he was on the point of telling the man in love with Hortense that he had promised the girl's hand to another person? Without going further into details, he declared that he did not wish to find on his return such a wretchedly immoral person at the Ministry. But on general principles he was heart-broken at the duplicity of the world — all was ingratitude and egotism. It was so bad, he would like to toss them into the street, all his honors and business matters, in order to quit Paris and become the keeper of a light-house on a horrible crag in the midst of the ocean.

"You have slept badly, my dear Master," said Méjean with his tranquil air.

"No, no, it is exactly as I tell you — Paris makes me sick at my stomach . . ."

Standing on the platform near the cars, he turned about with a gesture of supreme disgust aimed at that great city into which the provinces pour all their ambitions and concupiscences, all their boiling and sordid overflow — and then accuse it of degeneracy and moral taint. He interrupted his tirade and then, with a bitter laugh, pointing to a wall:

"How he does dog me everywhere, that fellow over there!"

On a vast gray wall pierced with hideous little windows at the angle of the Rue de Lyon, there was the picture of a wretched troubadour. Washed out by all the moisture of the winter and the filth from a barrack of poor people, the advertisement showed on the second story a frightful mess of blue, yellow and green through which one could still see the pretentious and victorious gesture of the tabor-player. In Parisian advertisements placards succeed each other quickly, one concealing the other; but when they are of enormous dimensions, some bit or end will stick out; wherefore it happened that in every corner of Paris during the last fortnight the Minister had found before his eyes either a leg or an arm, or a bit of the Provençal cap, or an end of the laced peasant's boots of Valmajour. These remnants threatened him even as in that Provençal legend the victim of a murder with his various limbs hacked and separated cries out against his murderer from all the separate bits of his body. But in this case he was there entire, and the horrible coloring seen through the chill morning air, forced as it was to receive unflinchingly all kinds of filth before it dropped away and disappeared under a final rush of wind, represented very well the destiny of the unfortunate troubadour, driven forever from pillar to post through the slums of that Paris which he could no longer quit, and conducting the *farandole* for a mob recruited from

the unclassed and exiled ones and the fools, those persons thirsting for notoriety whose end is the hospital, the dissection table and the potter's field.

Roumestan got into his coach frozen to the very bone by that morning apparition and by the cold of his sleepless night, shivering at sight through the car windows of those mournful vistas in the suburbs, those iron bridges across streets that shone with rain, those tall houses, barracks of wretchedness whose numberless windows were stuffed with rags, and then those early morning figures, hollow cheeked, sorrowful and sordid, those rounded backs and arms clutching breasts in order to conceal something or warm themselves, those taverns with signs in endless variety and the thick forest of factory chimneys vomiting smoke that falls at once to earth. After that came the first gardens of the outer suburb, black of soil, the coarse mortar in the low farm buildings, villas closely shuttered in the midst of their little gardens reduced by the winter to copses as dry as the bare wood of the kiosks and arbors, and then, farther on, the country roads broken up by puddles, where one saw files of overflowing tanks — a horizon the color of rust, and flights of crows over the deserted fields.

He closed his eyes to keep out this sorrowful Northern winter through which the whistle of the locomotive passed with long wails of distress, but his own thoughts under his lowered eyelids were in no respect happier. So near again to that fool of a girl — for the bond that held him to her

still contracted his heart though it had broken! — he pondered over all the different things he had done for her and what the support of an operatic star had cost him for the last six months. In that life of the boards everything is false, but especially success, which is only worth as much as one buys. The demands of the claque, cost of tickets at the office, of dinners, receptions, presents to reporters, publicity in all its varying forms, all these have their price; then the magnificent bouquets at sight of which the singer grows red and shows emotion, gathering them up against her arms and nude neck and the shining satin of her gown; and then the ovations prepared beforehand for the provincial tour, enthusiastic processions to the hotel, serenades to the diva's balcony and all the other things calculated to dispel the gloomy indifference of the public — ah, all these must not only be paid for but paid high!

For six months he had gone along with open pocketbook, never begrudging the triumphs arranged for the little girl. He was present at negotiations with the chief of the claque and the advertising agents of the newspapers, as well as the flower-woman whose bouquets the diva and her mother worked off on him three times without his knowledge merely by decking them out with fresh ribbons; for these Bordeaux Jewesses were possessed of a vulgar rapacity and a love of trickery and expedients which caused them at times to remain at home for entire days, clad in rags, old jackets over flowing skirts, with their feet in ancient

ball slippers. In fact it was thus that Numa found them oftenest, passing their time playing cards and reviling each other as if they were in a van of acrobats at a fair. For a good many months past they had no longer put on any restraint in his presence. He knew all the tricks and grimaces of the diva and the coarseness natural to an affected and unneat woman of the South: also that she was ten years older than her age on the boards and that in order to fix upon her face that eternal smile in a Cupid's bow she went to sleep each night with her lips pulled up at the corners and streaked with coral lip-paint.

At this point at last he himself fell asleep — but I can assure you that his mouth was not like a Cupid's bow; on the contrary his every feature was haggard from disgust and fatigue, while his entire body was shaken by the bumps and swayings to and fro and by the shocks of the express train whirled under full steam over the metals.

"*Valeïnce! — Valeïnce!*"

He opened his eyes like a child called by his mother. The South had already begun to appear; between the clouds, which the wind was driving apart, deep blue abysses were dug, and there was the sky! A ray of sunlight warmed the car window and among the roadside pines one saw the grayness of a few thin olive-trees. This produced a feeling of rest throughout the sensitive nature of the Southerner and a complete polar change of ideas. He was sorry that he had been so harsh to Lappara. Think of having de-

[illegible]

But his natal atmosphere rejoiced his heart the most — when he was able to leave the main line at

Tarascon and take a seat in a coach on the small patriarchal railway with a single track which pushes its way into the heart of Provence between the branches of mulberries and olive-trees, while tufts of wild rose scrape against the side doors. People were singing in the coaches; at every moment the train stopped in order to allow a flock of sheep to pass or to pick up a belated traveller or to ship some parcel which a boy from a *mas* brought up at a full run. And then what salutations and nice little bits of gossip between the train hands and the peasant women in their Arles head-dresses standing at their doors or washing clothes on the stone near the well! At the station what cries and hustlings — an entire village turning out to conduct to the cars some conscript or some girl who was off to the town for service.

"*Té! vé!* not good-bye, dear lass, . . . but be very good, *au moins!*"

Then they weep and embrace each other without taking any notice of the hermit in his cowl asking alms as he leans against the station fence and mumbles his pater-noster; then, enraged at receiving nothing, turns to go as he throws his sack upon his back.

"Well, there 's another *pater* gone to pot!"

That phrase catches and is understood, all tears are dried and the whole company roars with laughter, the begging monk harder than the rest.

Hidden away in his coach in order to escape ovations, Roumestan enjoyed immensely all this

jollity, pleased with the sight of these countenances all brown and hooked-nosed and alive with emotion and sarcasm, these big fellows with their smart air, these *chatos* as amber-colored as the long berries of the muscat grape, who as they grow older will turn into these crones, black and dried by the sun, who seem to scatter a dust as from the tomb every time they make one of their habitual gestures. So *son* then! and *allons!* and all the *en avants* in the world! Here he found once more his own people, his changeable and nervous Provence, that race of brown crickets always at the door and always singing!

But he himself was certainly a type of them, already recovered from his terrible despair of that morning, from his disgust and his love — all swept away at the first puff of the mistral which was growling in a lively fashion through the valley of the Rhône. It met the train midway, retarding its advance and driving everything before it, the trees bent over in an attitude of flight as well as the far-away Alpilles, the sun shaken by the sudden eclipses, whilst in the distance under a rapid gleam of sunshine the town of Aps grouped its monuments about the ancient tower of the Antonines, just as a herd of cattle huddles on the wide plain of the Camargue about the oldest bull in order to break the force of the wind.

So it was that Numa made his entrance into the station to the sound of that magnificent trumpeting of the mistral.

The family had kept his arrival secret through a

feeling of delicacy like his own, in order to avoid the Orpheons and banners and solemn deputations. Aunt Portal alone awaited him, majestically installed in the arm-chair belonging to the keeper of the station, with a warmer under her feet. As soon as she perceived her nephew the big rosy face of the stout lady, which had expanded in her reposeful position, took on a despairing expression and swelled up under the white lace cap, and stretching out her arms she burst into sobs and lamentations:

"*Aie de nous*, what a misfortune! . . . Such a pretty little thing, *péchère!* . . . and so good! . . . and so gentle! . . . you would take your bread from your mouth for her sake. . . ."

"Great Heavens, is it all over?" thought Roumestan as he reverted quickly to the real purpose of his journey.

His aunt suddenly interrupted her vociferations and said coldly and in a hard tone to the servant who had forgotten the foot-warmer:

"Ménicle, the *banquette!*" then she took up again on the pitch of a frenzy of grief the story of the virtues of Mlle. Le Quesnoy, calling with loud cries upon heaven and its angels to know why they had not taken her in place of that child and shaking Numa's arm with her explosions of sorrow; for she was leaning on him in order to reach her old coach at the slow gait of a funeral procession.

The horses advanced slowly under the leafless trees of the Avenue Berchère in a whirlwind of branches and dry bits of bark which the mistral

was scattering as a poor sort of welcome before the illustrious traveler. At the end of the road where the porters had formed the habit of taking the horses out Maxence was obliged to crack his whip many times, so surprised at this indifference for the great man did the horses seem to be. As for Laumonerie, he was only thinking of the horrible news which he had just learned, and holding the two dull hands of his aunt, who kept constantly drying her eyes, he gently asked: "When did it happen?"

"What happen?"

"When did she die, the poor little dear?"

Aunt Portal bounced up on her thick cushions:

"Die?—*Bon Dieu!*—who ever told you that she was dead?"

Then she added at once with a deep sigh:

"Only, *pécaire*, she will not be here for long."

Ah, no, not for very long, for now she no longer got up, never leaving the lace-covered pillows, on which from day to day her little thin head became less and less recognizable, painted as it was on the cheek-bones with a burning red cosmetic, whilst the eyes and nostrils were outlined in blue. With her ivory-white hands lying on the linen of the bed-clothes and a little hand-glass and comb near her to arrange from time to time her beautiful brown hair, she lay for hours without a word because of the wretched roughness that had invaded her voice, her look lost off there on the tips of the trees and in the brilliant sky over the old garden of the Portal mansion.

That evening her dreamy immobility lasted so long while the flames of the setting sun reddened all the chamber that her sister grew anxious:

"Are you asleep?"

Hortense shook her head as if she wished to drive something away:

"No, I was not asleep, and yet I was dreaming — I was dreaming that I am going to die. I was just on the borders of this world and leaning over into the other. Yes, leaning over enough to fall. I could see you still and some parts of my room, but all the same I was quite over on the other side, and what struck me most was the silence of this life in comparison with the tremendous sound that the dead were making. A sound of a bee-hive, of flapping wings and the low rustling of an ant-heap — the murmur which the sea leaves in the heart of its shells. It was just as if the realms of death were far more thickly peopled and encumbered than life. And all this noise was so intense that it seemed to me my ears heard for the first time and that I had discovered in me a new sense."

She talked slowly in her rough and hissing voice. After a silence she employed whatever there was left in the way of strength in that broken and wretched instrument:

"O! my head is always on the journey. — First prize for imagination — Hortense Le Quesnoy of Paris." A sob was heard which was drowned in the noise of a shutting door.

"You see," said Rosalie, "Mamma had to leave the room. You hurt her feelings so."

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"You see," said Rosalie, "Mamma had to leave the room. You hurt her feelings so."

"On purpose — every day a little — so that she shall have less to suffer at the last," answered the young girl in a whisper. The mistral was galloping through the big corridors of the old Provençal mansion, groaning under the doorways and shaking them with furious blows. Hortense smiled.

"Do you hear that? O, I love that, it makes me feel as if I were far away — off in the country. Poor darling," added she, taking her sister's hand and carrying it with a weary gesture as far as her mouth, "what a mean trick I have played you without intending to — here is your little one coming who'll be a Southerner all through my fault — and you will never forgive me for it, *Franciote!*" Through the clamor of the wind the whistle of a locomotive reached her and made her shiver.

"Ah, ha, the seven o'clock train!"

Like all sick people and prisoners, she knew what the slightest sounds about her meant and mingled them with her motionless existence, just as she did the horizon before her, the grove of pines and the old weather-beaten Roman tower on the slope. From that moment on she became anxious and agitated, watching the door at which at last a servant appeared.

"That's right," said Hortense, in a lively way, and smiling at her big sister: "Just a minute, will you? — I will call you again."

Rosalie thought it was a visit from the priest bringing his parochial Latin and his terrifying consolations, so she went down into the garden, which

was a truly Southern enclosure without any flowers, but with alleys of box sheltered by high cypresses that withstood the wind. Ever since she had been sick-nurse she had gone thither to get a breath of air and to conceal her tears and to slacken a little all the nervous contractions of her sorrow. Oh, how well she understood that speech made by her mother:

"There is no sorrow which is irreparable but one, and that is the loss of the person we love."

Her other sorrow, her happiness as a woman all destroyed, was quite in the background; she thought of nothing except that horrible and inevitable thing which was approaching day by day. Was it the evening hour, that red and deepening sun which left all the garden in shadow and yet lingered on the panes of the house, or that mournful wind blowing high up which she could hear without feeling it? At that moment she felt a melancholy, an anguish which could not be expressed in words. Hortense! her Hortense! more than a sister for her, almost a daughter . . . she had in Hortense the first happiness of a premature mother's love.

Sobs oppressed her, sobs without tears; she would have liked to cry aloud and call for help, but on whom? The sky, toward which the despairing raise their eyes, was so high, so far, so cold; it was as if polished off by the hurricane. Through that sky a flight of migrating birds was hurrying, but neither their cries nor their wings which made as much noise as flapping sails could be heard below. How then could a single voice from

earth reach and attain those silent and indifferent abysses?

Nevertheless she made a trial and with her face turned toward the light which moved ever upward and was passing from the roof of the old house, she made her prayer to Him who has thought fit to conceal Himself and protect Himself from our sorrows and lamentations — Him whom some adore confidentially with their brows against the earth, but others forlornly search for with their arms wide apart, while others finally threaten Him with their fists and revolt against Him, denying Him in order to be able to forgive His cruelties.

And denial of this sort, blasphemy of this kind — that also is prayer.

She was called to the house and ran in trembling with fear because she had reached that nervous terror when the slightest noise re-echoes from the very depth of one's being. The sick girl drew her near to her bed with her smile, for she had neither strength nor voice, as if she had just been talking a long time.

"I have a favor to ask of you, my darling — you know what I mean, that final favor which people grant to one who is condemned to die — forgive your husband! He has been very wicked and unworthy of you, but be indulgent and return to his side. Do this for me, dear sister, and for our parents, whom your separation grieves to death and who will soon need greatly that all should close round about them and surround them with tender care. Numa is so lively, there is no one like him

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for putting a little spirit into them. . . . It is all over, is it not? You forgive?"

Rosalie answered, "Yes, I give you my promise."

Of what value was this sacrifice of her pride beside this irreparable disaster? Standing straight beside the bed she closed her eyes a moment, keeping back her tears — a hand which trembled rested upon hers. There he was in front of her, trembling, wretched and overwhelmed by an effusion of heart which he dared not show.

"Kiss each other," said Hortense.

Rosalie bent her brow forward and Numa kissed it timidly. "No, no, not that way — both arms, the way one does when one really loves."

Numa seized his wife and clasped her with one long sob, whilst the twilight fell in the great chamber as an act of pity for the girl who had thrown them one upon the other's heart.

This was her last manifestation of life. From that moment she remained absorbed, indifferent and unaware of what passed about her, never answering those disconsolate appeals of farewell to which there is no answer, but still keeping upon her young face that expression of haughty underlying anger which those show who die too early for the ardor of the life that is in them — those to whom the disillusions of existence have not had time to speak their last word.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BAPTISM.

THE important day at Aps is Monday because it is market day.

Long before daylight the roads that lead to the city, the great solitary turnpikes from Arles and Avignon, where the white dust lies as quiet as a fall of snow, are enlivened by the slow grinding noise of the carts and the squawking of chickens in their osier crates and the barking of dogs running alongside; or by that rustling sound of a shower which the passage of a flock of sheep produces, accompanied by the long blouse of the shepherd which one perceives as he is carried along by the bounding wave of his beasts. Then there are cries of the cow-boys panting in the rear of their cattle and the dull sound of sticks falling upon humpy backs and outlines of horsemen armed with cow-punches in trident form. Slowly and gropingly all these phantoms are swallowed up by the dark gateways whose crenelations are seen in festoons against the starry sky; thence it spreads wide again into the *corso* which surrounds the sleepy city.

At that hour the town takes on itself again its character of an old Roman and Saracen city, with

its irregular roofs and pointed moucharabies above the broken and dangerous stairways. This confused murmur of men and sleepy beasts penetrates with but little noise between the silvery trunks of the big plane-trees, overflows upon the avenue and even into the courtyards of the houses and stirs up warm odors of litters and fragrances of herbs and ripe fruit. When it wakes, therefore, the town discovers that it has been captured in every quarter by an enormous, lively and noisy market, just as if the entire agricultural part of Provence, men and beasts, fruits and seeds, had roused up and come together in one great nocturnal inundation.

In truth it is a magnificent sight, a pouring forth of rustic wealth that changes with the seasons. In certain places set apart by immemorial usage the oranges and pomegranates, golden colored quinces, sorbs, green and yellow melons, are piled up near the booths in rows and in heaps by the thousand; peaches, figs and grapes destroy themselves by their own weight in their baskets of transportation side by side with vegetables in sacks. Sheep and silky pigs and little *cabris* (kids) show airs of weariness within the palisades of their small reservations. Oxen fastened to the yoke stride along before the buyer, while bulls with smoking nostrils drag at the iron ring which holds them to the wall. And farther on, quantities of horses, the little horses from the Camargue — dwarf Arabs — prance about mingling their brown, white or russet manes; upon being called by name, "*Té!* Lucifer — *Té!* l'Esterel —" they run up to eat oats from the

hands of their keepers, veritable Gauchos of the pampas with boots above the knee. Then come the poultry two by two, red and fastened by the legs, guinea fowl and chickens lying, not without much banging of the earth with their wings, at the feet of their mistresses who are drawn up in a line. Then there is the fish market, with eels alive on fennel and trout from the Sorgue and the Durance, mixing their shining scales in rainbow agonies with all the rest of the color. And last of all, at the very end, in a sort of dry winter forest are the wooden spades and hay-forks and rakes, new and very white, which rise between the plows and harrows.

On the other side of the *corso* against the rampart the unhitched wagons stand in line, with their canopies and linen covers and high curtains and dusty wheels, and all through the space left vacant the noisy crowd circulates with difficulty, with calls and discussions and chattering in all kinds of dialects and accents — the Provençal accent, which is refined and full of airs and graces and requires certain movements of the head and shoulder and a bold sort of mimicry, while that of Languedoc is harder and heavier and almost Spanish in its articulation. From time to time this mass of felt hats and head-dresses from Arles or the Comté, this difficult circulation of a mob of buyers and sellers, splits in two at the cries from some lagging cart which comes slowly forward with great difficulty at a snail's pace.

The burgesses of the city hardly appear, so full of scorn are they at this invasion from the coun-

try, which nevertheless is the occasion of its originality and the source of its wealth. From morning to night the peasants are walking through the streets, stopping at the booths, at the harness-makers, shoemakers and watchmakers, staring at the metal figures of the clock on the City Hall and into the shop windows, dazzled by the gilding and mirrors of the restaurants, just as the rustics in Theocritus stood and stared at the Palace of the Ptolemies. Some issue from the drug shops laden with parcels and big bottles; others, and they form a wedding procession, enter the jeweller's to choose, after long and cunning bargains, ear-rings with long pendent pieces and the necklace for the coming bride. And these coarse gowns, these brown and wild-looking faces and their eager, businesslike manner make one think of some town in La Vendée taken by the Chouans at the time of the great wars.

That morning, the third Monday of February, animation was very lively; the crowd was as thick as on the finest summer days, which indeed it suggested through its cloudless sky warmed by a golden sun. People were talking and gesticulating in groups, but what agitated them was less the buying and selling than a certain event which caused all traffic to cease and turned all looks and heads and even the broad eyes of the oxen and the twitching ears of the little Camargue horses toward the Church of Sainte Perpétue. The fact was that a rumor had just spread through the market, where it occasioned an emotion that

ran to extraordinary height, to the effect that to-day the son of Numa would be baptized — that same little Roumestan whose birth three weeks before had been received with transports of joy in Aps and the entire Provençal South. Unfortunately this baptism, which had been delayed because of the deep mourning the family was in, had to preserve the appearance of incognito for the very same reason, and it is probable that the ceremony would have passed unperceived had it not been for certain old sorceresses belonging to the country about Les Baux who every Monday install upon the front steps of Sainte Perpétue a little market of aromatic herbs and dried and perfumed simples culled among the Alpilles. Seeing the coach of Aunt Portal stopping in front of the church, the old herb-sellers gave the alarm to the women who sell *aïets* (garlic), who move about pretty much everywhere from one end of the *corso* to the other with their arms crammed with the shining wreaths of their wares. The garlic women notified the fish dames and very soon the little street which leads to the church poured forth upon the little square all the gossip and excitement of the market-place. They pressed about Ménicle, who sat erect on the box in deep mourning with crape on his arm and hat and merely answered all questions with a silent and indifferent play of his shoulders. Spite of everything, they insisted upon waiting, and in the mercer's street beneath the bands of calico the crowd piled itself up to suffocation while the bolder

spirits mounted the well-curb — all eyes fixed on the grand portal of the church, which at last opened.

There was a murmur of "ah!" as when fireworks are let off, a triumphant and modulated sound which was cut short by the sight of a tall old man dressed in black, very much overwhelmed and very melancholy, who gave his arm to Madame Portal, who as far as she was concerned was very proud to have served as godmother along with the First President, proud of their two names side by side on the parish register; but she was saddened by the recent mourning and the sorrowful impressions which she had just renewed once more in the church. The crowd had a feeling of severe deception at sight of this austere couple, who were followed by the great man of Aps, also entirely in black and with gloves on — Numa, penetrated by the solitude and cold of this baptism performed in the midst of four candles without any other music than the wailing of the little child, upon whom the Latin of the function and the baptismal water dropping on a tender little head like that of an unfledged bird had caused the most disagreeable impression. But the appearance of a richly fed nurse, large, heavy and decked with ribbons like a prize at an agricultural meet, and the sparkling little parcel of laces and white embroidery which she carried like a sash, dissipated the melancholy of the spectators and roused a new cry that sounded like a mounting rocket, a joy scattered into a thousand enthusiastic exclamations:

"*Lou vaqui!* — there he is! *Vé! vé!*"

Surprised and dazzled, winking in the bright sunlight, Numa stopped a moment on the high porch in order to look at these Moorish faces, this closely packed herding together of a black flock from which a crazy tenderness mounted up to where he stood. And although tired of ovations, at that moment he had one of the most lively emotions in his existence as a public man, a proud intoxication which an entirely new and already very lively sentiment of paternity ennobled. He was about to speak and then remembered that this platform in front of the church was not the place for it.

"Get in, nurse," said he to the tranquil wet-nurse from Bourgogne, whose eyes, like those of a milch cow, were staring wide open in amazement. And while she was bestowing herself with her light burden in the coach he advised Ménicle to return quickly by the cross streets. But a tremendous clamor answered him:

"No, no, the grand round — the grand round!"

They meant that he should pass the entire length of the market place.

"Well then, the grand round be it!" said Roumestan after having consulted his father-in-law with a look; for he wished to spare him this joyful procession; and so the coach, starting with many crackings of its ancient and heavy carcass, entered the little street and debouched upon the *corso* in the midst of *vivas* from the crowd, which grew excited over its own cries and culminated in

a whirl of enthusiasm so as to block the way of horses and wheels at every moment. With the windows open they marched slowly on through these acclamations, raised hats, fluttering handkerchiefs and all the odors and hot breaths which the market exhaled as they passed. The women stuck their ardent bronzed heads forward right into the carriage and at seeing no more than the cap of the little baby would exclaim:

"*Diou! lou bèu drôle!*" (My God! what a lovely child!)

"He looks just like his father — *qué?*"

"Already has his Bourbon nose and his fine manners!"

"Show it to us, my darling, show us your beautiful man's face."

"He is as lovely as an egg!"

"You could drink him in a glass of water!"

"*Té!* my treasure!"

"My little quail!"

"My lambkin — my guinea-hen!"

"My lovely pearl!"

And these women wrapped and licked him with the brown flame from their eyes. But he, a child but one month old, was not scared in the least. Waked up by all this noise and leaning back on the cushion with its bows of pink ribbon, he regarded everything with his little cat eyes, the pupils dilated and fixed, with two drops of milk at the corners of his lips. And there he lay, calm and evidently pleased at these apparitions of heads at the windows and these growing noises with

which soon mingled the baaing, mooing and braying of the cattle, seized as they were by a formidable nervous imitation, all their necks stretched out and mouths open and jaws yawning to the glory of Roumestan and his offspring! Even then, at a time when everybody else in the carriage was holding their stunned ears with both hands, the little man remained perfectly impassible, so that his coolness even broke up the solemn features of the old President, who said:

"Well, if that fellow was not born for the forum!"

On leaving the market they hoped to be rid of all this, but the crowd followed them, being joined as they went by the weavers on the Chemin-neuf, the yarn-makers in womanly bands and the porters from the Avenue Berchère. The shopmen ran to the threshold of their stores, the balcony of the Club of the Whites was flooded with people and presently with their banners the Orphéons debouched from all the streets singing their choral songs and giving musical bursts, just as if Numa had arrived; but along with it all there went something gayer and more unhackneyed, something beyond the habitual merry-making.

In the finest room belonging to the Portal Mansion, whose white wainscots and rich silks belonged to the last century, Rosalie was stretched upon an invalid's chair, turning her eyes now upon the empty cradle and then upon the deserted and sunny street; she grew impatient as she waited for the return of her child. On her fine features, pale

and creased with fatigue and tears, one might see nevertheless something like a happy restfulness; yet one could read there the whole history of her existence throughout the last two months, her anxieties and tortures, her rupture with Numa, the death of her dear Hortense and at last the birth of the child, which swept everything else into insignificance.

When this great happiness really came to her she did not believe it possible; broken by so many blows, she did not believe herself capable of giving life to anything. During the last days she even imagined that she no longer felt the impatient movements of the little captive, and although cradle and layette were all ready she hid them, moved by a superstitious fear, and merely notified the Englishwoman who took care of her:

"If child's clothes are asked for, you will know where to find them."

It is nothing to abandon oneself to a bed of torture with closed eyes and clenched teeth for many, many long hours, interrupted every five minutes by a terrible cry that tears and compels one; it is nothing to undergo one's destiny as a victim all of whose happy moments must be dearly bought — if there is hope at the end of it all. But what horrible martyrdom in the final pain when, struck by a supreme disillusionment, the almost animal lamentations of the woman are mingled with the deeper sobs of deceived maternity! Half dead and bleeding, she kept repeating from the bottom of her annihilation: "He is dead — he is dead!"

— when she heard that trial of a voice, that respiration and cry in one, that appeal for light which the newborn infant makes. Ah, with what overflowing tenderness did she not respond!

"My little one!"

He lived and they brought him to her. So this was hers after all, this little creature short of breath, dazzled and startled — almost blind! This small affair in the flesh connected her again with life, and merely by pressing it against her all the feverishness of her body was drowned by a sensation of comfortable coolness. No more mourning, no more wretchedness! Here was her son, that desire and regret which she had endured for ten years and had burnt her eyes with tears whenever she saw the children of other people, that very same baby which she had kissed so often beforehand upon so many other lovely little rosy cheeks! There he was, and he caused her a new ravishment and surprise every time that she leaned from her bed over his cradle and swept aside the covers that hid a slumber that could hardly be heard and the shivery and contracted positions of a newly born child. She wanted to have him always near her. When he went out she was anxious and counted every minute. But never had she experienced quite so much anguish as upon this morning of the baptism.

"What time is it?" asked she every minute. "How long they are! Heavens, what a time they take!"

Mme. Le Quesnoy, who had remained behind

with her daughter, reassured her, although she was herself a little anxious; for this grandson, the first and only one, was very close to the heart of his grandparents and lighted up their mourning with a hope. A distant clamor which grew deeper as it approached increased the trouble of the two women. Running to the window they listened — choral songs, gunshots, clamors, bells ringing like mad! And all of a sudden the Englishwoman who is looking out on the street cries: "Madame, it is the baptism!"

And so it was the baptism, this noise like a riot and these howlings as of cannibals around the stake.

"Oh, this South, this South!" repeated the young mother, now very much frightened, for she feared that her little one would be suffocated in the press.

But not at all; here he was, very alive indeed, in splendid case, waving his short little arms with his eyes wide open, wearing the long baptismal robe whose decorations Rosalie herself had embroidered and whose laces she herself had sewed on; it was the robe meant for the other; and so it is her two sons in one, the dead and the living one, whom she owns to-day.

"He did not make a cry, or ask for milk a single time the whole journey!" Aunt Portal affirms, and then goes on to relate in her picturesque way the triumphal tour of the town, whilst in the old hotel, which has suddenly become the old house for ovations, all the doors slam and the ser-

vants rush out into the porch where the musicians are being regaled with *gazeuse.* The musical bursts resound and the panes tremble in every window. The old Le Quesnoys have gone out into the garden to get away from this jollity which overwhelms them with grief, and since Roumestan is about to make a speech from the balcony, Aunt Portal and Polly the Englishwoman run quickly into the drawing-room to listen.

"If Madame would be so kind as to hold the baby?" asks the wet-nurse, as consumed with curiosity as a wild woman. And Rosalie is only too happy to remain behind with her child upon her knees. From her window she can see the banners glittering in the wind and the crowd densely crushed together and spellbound by the words of her great man. Phrases from his speech reach her now and then, but more than all else she hears the tone of that captivating and moving voice, and a sorrowful shudder passes through her at thought of all the evil which has come to her by way of that eloquence, so ready to lie and to dupe others.

At last it is all over; she feels that she has reached a point where deceptions and wounds can hurt her no more; she has a child, and that sums up all her happiness, all her dreams! And holding him up like a buckler she hugs the dear little creature to her breast and questions him very low and very near by, as if she were looking for some response, or some resemblance in the sketchy features of this unformed little countenance, these

dainty lineaments which seem to have been impressed by a caress in wax and already show a sensual, violent mouth, a nose curved in search of adventures and a soft and square chin.

"And will you also be a liar? Will you pass your life betraying others and yourself, breaking those innocent hearts who have never done you other evil than to believe in and love you? Will you be possessed of a light and cruel inconstancy, taking life like an amateur and a singer of cavatinas? Will you make a merchandise of words without bothering yourself as to their real value and their connection with your thought, so long as they are brilliant and resounding?"

And putting her lips in a kiss upon that little ear which the light strands of hair surround:

"Tell me, are you going to be a Roumestan?"

The orator on the balcony had lashed himself up and had reached the moment of effusiveness when nothing could be heard except the final chords, accentuated in the Southern manner — "my soul" — "my blood" — "morals" — "religion" — "our country" — punctuated by the applause of that audience which was made according to his image and which he summed up in his own self both in his qualities and his vices — an effervescing South, mobile and tumultuous like a sea with many currents, each of which spoke of him!

There was a final *viva* and then the crowd was heard slowly passing away. Roumestan came into the room mopping his brow; intoxicated by his triumph and warmed by this endless tender-

ness of the whole people, he approached his wife and kissed her with a sincere effusion of sentiment. He felt himself very kind to her and as tender as on the first day of their marriage; never a bit of remorse and never a bit of rancor!

"*Bé!* just see how they make much of him! How they applaud your son!" Kneeling before the sofa the grand personage of Aps played with his child and touched the little fingers that seized upon everything and the little feet that kicked out into the air.

With a wrinkle on her brow Rosalie looked at him, trying to define his contradictory and inexplicable nature. Then suddenly, as if she had found something:

"Numa, what was that proverb you people use which Aunt Portal repeated the other day? '*Joie de rue*' — how was it?"

"Oh yes, I remember: '*Gau de carriero, doulou d'oustau.*'" (Happiness of the street, sorrow of the home.)

"That is it," said she with an expression of deep thought. And, letting the words fall one by one as you drop stones into an abyss, she slowly repeated, putting the while the sorrow of her life into it, this proverb, in which an entire race has drawn its own portrait and formulated its own being:

"Happiness of the street, sorrow of the home."

THE END.

ROSE AND NINETTE.

ROSE AND NINETTE.

MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF OUR DAY.

"After clearly perceiving that study of books and striving after nicety of language merely lead us into parodoxes, I have resolved never to make any sacrifice save in favor of conviction and truth, in order that a complete and profound sincerity shall dominate my works and lend them that consecrated character which the divine presence of the truth ought to give, that character which makes tears come to our eyes when a child bears witness to what it has seen."

ALFRED DE VIGNY.
(*Journal d'un Poète.*)

CHAPTER I.

ONLY fifteen days after the divorce had been granted to him, and still intoxicated with the happiness of his release from bondage, Régis de Fagan stood one morning at the open window of his new bachelor apartments, watching for the appearance of his two little daughters, who were allowed by the Court to spend two Sundays in the month with him. This was their first Sunday, and in all the pile of letters from women showered for the last twenty years upon the table of the popular playwright very few had caused him such

emotion as the simple little note that had come the evening before:

"My Dear Father — We shall be at Passy to-morrow by the ten o'clock train. Mademoiselle will leave us in front of 37 Boulevard Beauséjour and come for us at nine o'clock in the evening punctually.

"Your respectful and most affectionate daughter,

"Rose de Fagan."

Underneath, in a large and still somewhat unformed hand, the younger sister had placed her signature "Ninette."

And now, made nervous by the length of time he had to wait, he was asking himself if they would really come, if at the last moment their mother, that wily and unscrupulous one, or the redoubtable mademoiselle, might not have found some pretext to detain them. Not that he doubted the affection of his daughters, but they were so young — Rose barely sixteen, Nina not yet twelve — both powerless to resist a hostile influence; the more so that, since the divorce and their return from the convent, they had lived entirely with their mother and their governess.

His lawyer had said to him:

"The game is not a square one, my poor Régis; you will have only two days a month in which to gain their hearts."

Never mind, with those two days well employed the father felt strong enough to retain the love of his darlings, but he required the whole of

these two days actually, without any tricks or foolish excuses. Becoming more and more anxious as the hour approached, more agitated by the anticipation of this interview than he had ever been by any other in his life, whether of a tender or of a business nature, Fagan became violently impatient, thrust his long body out of the window and looked up and down the green and peaceful surburban street, with the railroad on one side of it screened by a trellis and a hedge, and on the other a row of handsome residences with broad steps, many flowers and well kept lawns.

"Good-morning, papa; here we are!"

"You! Why, how did you get here — how did you get in?"

He had been so busy calculating the time, watching the trains and scanning the passers-by, that he had missed them, and they rushed in upon him now out of the little antechamber. There they were before him, grown much larger, it seemed to him, and more womanlike during the two or three months since he had seen them. His hands shook as he helped them to remove their close-fitting jackets and their round hats laden with feathers.

The children themselves felt somewhat embarrassed at the novelty of the situation. Of course their father was still their father — the jolly, amiable father, who had played with them and danced them so gayly on his knee when they were little; but he was no longer the husband of their mother, and this made a wonderful change which they felt

but could not have explained, which expressed itself by the simple wonder in their eyes.

This awkwardness soon vanished, however, as they inspected the apartment, bright in the cheerful May sunshine, some of the rooms looking out on the boulevard and others upon the garden of the house, the large shade-trees making it seem larger than it really was. Almost all the furniture was new, but in the study the children recognized a bookcase and the large writing-table, the sharp corners of which paternal caution had caused to be rounded off, as dangerous to two little heads that formerly often played hide-and-seek under it. What memories were associated with every corner of those massive pieces of furniture with twisted brasses on the drawers!

"Do you remember, Ninette, that time when mamma" —

But Ninette, younger but quicker-witted and keener than the other sister, cut the anecdote short.

The fact was, before sending her daughters to visit their father the late Madame de Fagan, now called by her maiden name of Ravaut, had warned her daughters that they were not to talk about her and give no information as to her present way of living or her plans for the future, as she wished no spying on her affairs; and knowing big Rose to be thoughtless and light-minded, had particularly impressed her injunctions on Ninette, whose little face was amusing with its tightly closed, secretive mouth and its eyes as

full of shrewdness and sharpness as those of a mouse. Could it be possible that Mme. Ravaut should so soon have forgotten the nature of the proud man whose wife she had been for nearly twenty years as to think that he would use the children as spies upon their mother?

Truly it is not easy to become indifferent suddenly to the existence of one whose life has been your life, whose excitements and reactions, joys and sorrows have been echoed daily in your own heart; but Régis de Fagan threw his whole will into forgetting; he never even mentioned his wife's name; and as the children were also preoccupied by the same effort, the gay little trip through the new rooms was often broken by sudden silences and pauses and what in theatrical parlance are called "gaps."

In the bedroom, for instance, Rose and Ninette could not repress a cry of surprise at sight of the little iron bed — a simple student's bed without curtains or hangings. The two children looked at one another and both thought of the Christmas and New-Year mornings, when they had come running, their feet entangled in their long night-gowns and their eyes still heavy with sleep, to climb into the big bed and exchange kisses and gifts with papa and mamma.

The eyes of Rose and Ninette expressed still more when they observed, hanging at the head of the bed, several pictures that used to hang in their parents' chamber in the Rue Laffitte which their father had carried away with him.

First there was the big pastel by Besnard in which they were represented hand in hand at the age of six and ten, dressed in a Greenaway costume with big muslin sun-bonnets and enormous sleeves; then the portrait of their father's mother, a pastel under glass in an oval frame — they had never known their grandmother, but their mother had always said that she was a very, very severe person.

What strange reflections were passing through these young minds, what a confusion of all their ideas of persons and things, once united and now scattered, as on the day after a fire or a shipwreck! And how perplexing it must seem, how alarming, in that absence of reasoning power which characterizes and signifies extreme youth! Luckily they came next to the cheerful dining-room, where the sun was pouring in through the open windows and the air was sweet with odors from the garden.

The table was laid daintily, appetizingly, a bouquet at the plate of each of the girls. This last attention had been paid by Mme. Hulin.

"Mme. Hulin?" asked Ninette, her little round eyes shining with sudden curiosity.

"My landlady; she lives on the ground floor and lets this one in order not to feel so lonely in the house; for she is a widow with one little boy and an ancient governess."

"Some one for papa to flirt with," said Rose recklessly as she stood arranging her curls with the aid of a hand-glass. De Fagan glanced at

her sadly; his wife had so often made just such foolish speeches; and yet of the two Rose was the one who physically resembled Mme. Ravaut less. She was tall and slight and stooped a little; with her dark Creole complexion and a grave and sentimental expression she repeated the type of her father. In a tone of gentle reproach he answered:

"I have little heart for that, my dear child, and I fancy poor Mme. Hulin thinks as little about flirting as I do; but she is a very devoted mother, and knowing that my daughters were to come this morning, she picked these flowers for them."

The servant brought in the first course, which was eggs flavored with morel, the favorite dish of Ninette, and was received with cries of delight: "Ah, here is Anthyme! How are you, Anthyme?" He had been in the service of the De Fagans for several years, and reddening, embarrassed by the peculiarity of the situation, he stammered:

"A very good day to you, young ladies!"

He was a peasant from Bauce, quite untaught, with straight hair covering an almost imperceptible forehead; it seemed as if some one had shaved off the top of his head, taking his intellect with it. Madame had hated him on account of his utter stupidity, and Régis had kept him after his divorce perhaps because Anthyme was still friendly with the other servants and in this way he could get daily news from the Rue Laffitte.

This well-known face, so simple and kindly,

made the luncheon seem more homelike and pleasant to the children. The luncheon was a masterpiece — each dish had been discussed between Fagan and his servant. Did Miss Rose like sugar in her peas? Did Miss Nina prefer chocolate to vanilla ice-cream?

Carried away by the delicious repast, by the glory of their new spring costumes, in their gay chatter the excited children forgot the injunctions of their mother; especially Rose, to whom Nina constantly made repressing signs. Thus Fagan learned without any seeking on his part that last Friday "cousin" had taken them to the Opéra Comique. The name of "cousin" had been one of the forbidden subjects; but Rose could not learn discretion, so in order not to let her make disclosures that might cause trouble for her when she returned home, her father turned the conversation to indifferent topics, asking them about their convent in the beautiful gardens of the Assumption, where they had passed so many happy years, gardens they could almost see from where they sat.

Were they not a little sorry to leave it? Did they not wish to return?

"No, indeed!" they replied in the same breath.

"Why not, my darlings? you used formerly to like so much to go back."

They hesitated to answer — but he knew well what they meant. The house was quite different since their parents had separated, for they lived in an atmosphere of perpetual disputes, where

propriety was often disregarded, and where they themselves were sometimes compelled to take a part; thus:

"Do you hear, my children, how your father speaks to me?"

"Madame, you forget yourself in the presence of your daughters!"

They had to be sent to the convent to save them from such scenes. But as soon as the divorce was granted and the father had departed, the mother had hastened to recall her children, suddenly seized with an attack of maternal affection little in keeping with her hard and capricious nature. She seemed determined to conquer the hearts of her daughters. Mademoiselle also softened her severities both as chaperon and instructress.

This transformation was pleasantly visible even in the toilets of the children; until now their mother had only interested herself in her own toilets, using on them all the available money and time; but at the sight of the two charming little fashion-plates who had fluttered into his room this morning, instead of the two demure little lay sisters with their smooth hair and plain uniforms who used to spend their Saturdays at home, Fagan understood that their mother, so little a mother formerly, was going to flatter and spoil her children, not because she really loved them, but from base jealousy, a desire to tease and torture her whilom husband. He could foresee a lot of sorrow and

trouble, a war made up of little pin-pricks — but why torment oneself just yet? Had n't he his daughters with him, close to him, until evening? After lunch he was going to take them to a matinée at the Théâtre Français, where one of his pieces they had not yet seen was being played.

Think of the joy, the pride of sitting in a fine box and listening to the best actors in Paris playing, before a crowded house, a drama of which your own father is the author!

Even with the aid of mademoiselle, Mme. Ravaut could not give them such a pleasure as that! And after the play there was to be a drive in the Bois and dinner at a fashionable restaurant. This was another pleasure that their mother could not have given them, unless "cousin" had been with them. O, the delight of ordering the waiter to bring the most unusual dishes, of hearing the whispers of the occupants of the neighboring tables imbued with true Parisian interest in a man of mark:

"Régis de Fagan and his two daughters."

Then, as the shadows of evening fell, to return, sitting close beside their father, through the sweet-smelling, deserted paths of the Bois, by the cool, misty lakes, back to Passy and the Boulevard Beauséjour, where mademoiselle was waiting for them in a carriage — that was what might be called a delightful day!

This programme of delights laid before them and the gayety of the luncheon caused a rosy

flame to illumine the pale cheeks of the little Parisians. Through the open windows came the odor of roses and lilies-of-the-valley. A blackbird was singing vociferously at the top of an old elm and Ninette went to the window to see if she could make the bird out in the branches near the window; just then a clear, childish voice called to her from the lawn below:

"Come down and play with me — say — won't you?"

It was little Maurice Hulin, a charming little boy of ten, with a complexion like a camellia and long red-brown curls, who, having injured his knee, was jumping about with the aid of a short crutch. Mme. Hulin, who was reading near her little boy, looked up and said: "Excuse him," and "Thank you," with a smile on her charming and still fresh lips.

"Do not forget that we are going to the Français, Ninette," cried the elder sister, irritated to see Ninette so easily won over by a new comrade. The little one ran off without hearing her.

"Shall we go down too?" said her father; "you will see that she is a charming woman."

But Rose refused absolutely. She didn't know these people. And in the tone of voice of the young girl, as she lounged beside her father at the window, there sounded a dawning antipathy to Mme. Hulin, as also in the critical examination that she made of the dress and bearing of the woman sitting below them.

The bearing was very simple and the half-mourning costume was only brightened by the white lace on her garden hat and its bows of lilac ribbon, just the shade of the purple iris growing on the lawn.

CHAPTER II.

AN intimacy growing out of the simllarity of their situations, a sympathy that as yet neither had tried to analyze, had sprung up between the playwright and his neighbor. One day they had been alone together the whole evening in the little parlor on the ground-floor. The little boy had been put to bed; in the distance they could hear the roar of Paris, but the boulevard was silent, except for the occasional barking of a watch-dog or the thunder of passing trains that shook the house to its foundations. Suddenly the clock, a family relic harmonizing with the Empire tables and chairs, struck ten, and Mme. Hulin began to laugh softly as she bit off the thread of her embroidery with her white teeth.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Régis, with the eternal disquiet that a man feels in the face of the feminine enigma and suspicious of the latent raillery that always survives childhood in the most well-balanced woman.

She raised her large blue eyes, with their nacrous whites, most striking for their purity in features handsome yet strong, ripe with their well-nigh thirty years of life:

"I laugh," she said, "because it is ten o'clock and to-night again you have not gone out; and such an existence for Régis de Fagan seems strange indeed!" Fagan smiled also.

"What is your idea, anyhow, of the life of an artist? — that they are all fearfully worldly — all night owls and indulgers in orgies?"

Pauline Hulin hesitated, then:

"I am thinking of life behind the scenes, with all its temptations, its pitfalls — had I been the wife of one of your profession I should have been very fearful."

"Fearful! of what? Of the actresses? — ah, no!"

And the writer of plays, the man of experience that Fagan was, began to analyze the artificial and made-up side of these strange people, with their prepared speeches and borrowed sentiments, saturated with the influence of the characters that they assume, using their intonation and gestures like mechanical dolls. Actresses? Why, if by any chance one of them should experience a thrill of real passion, should whisper an "I love you" not learned at the Conservatory, she would immediately think "How well I said that!" and would reserve it to use in the next melodrama in which she should act. And yet such good comrades, kind-hearted, never refusing to help those poorer than themselves! You should be behind the scenes when the actors are alone, the artists among themselves, with neither author nor stage manager present; you should hear

the things that they call out to each other from one dressing-room to another — it is like a circus drag or the interior of a perambulating caravan. One must be very young to seek his pleasure in such a place.

Mme. Hulin, listening attentively, although seemingly intent upon the work upon her lap, answered gravely:

"I grant you the actresses, although I am sure you exaggerate; but for the celebrated man, the successful author, how many temptations there must be! Admiring ladies of fashion, letters sent to you *poste-restante*, all the flatteries that you receive from unknown persons who worship you from afar!"

"O, that sort is not at all dangerous — not in the least attractive," said Régis. "In the first place they are always the same — a half-dozen hysterical women or strangers collecting autographs. I have often compared notes with my brother authors; their fair unknowns are invariably the same as mine."

Pauline looked up: "But it might happen that a woman touched deeply by a fine play or a clever bit of writing should be tempted to thank the author."

"She might write, perhaps, but if she were really refined she would not send the letter — I defy you to contradict me," he answered, looking searchingly at her.

"O, I myself am never impulsive —" Here a cry from the little boy interrupted her and drew

her into the next room; returning after a few moments: "He is restless to-night," she said in a low voice.

In that same tone which made their conversation seem more intimate, Régis continued:

"So you thought that I was wild and dissipated — undeceive yourself. The life that I am leading now I had hoped to find in my marriage; and it is my dislike of society, my stay-at-home habits, that have made all the trouble with my wife. This was her first grievance, the first cause of our disagreements. Whose fault was it?

"I married at eight and twenty, successful in my profession, satiated with all the pleasures the theatre can give, and I pitch upon a woman who is wild about first nights, benefits and author's passes.

"I had been told of an old M. Ravaut who had made a large fortune in making and renting theatrical costumes — and perhaps this ancestral connection with tinsel, wigs and flowered waistcoats may have affected that poor little brain of hers. You see what a mistake it was — a man who marries to escape all this fictitious kind of life, to make a fireside for himself that is not in the Français or the Opéra Comique, and a woman who only seeks a very prominent name, which will give her a place at rehearsals and on the first page of the papers."

"A cruel mistake, indeed," said Mme. Hulin, but without conviction. There was something in

her truthful voice and frank countenance that expressed doubt.

Fagan, who understood this well, tried to convince her:

"It was I who yielded, as I was the more in love of the two — for I was desperately in love — and not, like her, with newspaper notoriety and empty glory.

"Every evening for years I was dragged to every kind of public entertainment; we made part of that dreadful 'All Paris' that shows itself everywhere — more of a show than the showmen themselves, people to whom no respite ever comes. At all the first nights, at all the theatres, we occupied ever the same seats. I watched the heads of the critics in the stalls grow bald, the wrinkles in the faces of my neighbors deepen — they also were always in the same places; and I listened to my wife as she said, 'See, Mrs. X. has put new pink strings to her bonnet to make people think it is new,' — or else, 'Look at the Z——s, how old they have grown!'

"Then in the *entr'actes*, never weary, scanning the audience through her opera-glass, she would enumerate the well-known names, relate little incidents and the petty scandals that Paris talks about all winter, which add piquancy to its amusements and give it its keenest zest. I led this existence of a provincial Jacquemart long enough to grow weary and disgusted with it, and this is really the cause of our divorce."

Mme. Hulin shook her head with a little

motion of doubt. "I thought there had been talk of a certain story — "

"O, yes, the story of my being caught in the Hôtel d'Espagne; it was in all the papers. Confess, it was that which gave you such a bad opinion of me! What if I should tell you that this same crime was the plan of my own wife?"

He continued, much to the amazement of Pauline:

"Until to-day only three persons were in the secret of the comedy — my former wife, myself and Counsellor de Malville — you know him?" he asked in response to a start from Mme. Hulin, who nodded in the affirmative; then without a pause he related his conjugal adventure:

"We were tired to death of each other — no one could have been more so; but that was n't enough — 'We must have some facts to go upon,' said De Malville, a great friend of my wife and a confirmed music-maniac, as they were reading over the last score of Wagner at the piano. 'Get up a real scandal, a positive proof, and I will undertake your case.'

"Perhaps I should not have had to search farther than the relations of Mme. de Fagan and her cousin La Posterolle for the proofs required by the counsellor; but two reasons restrained me. In the first place, my own weakness in allowing this young man, a master of requests in the Council of State, to become an intimate in my family, begging him myself to escort my wife and daughters to the theatre and to other func-

tions. It was the result of my dislike of going out and my utter satiety with social pleasures. But the other motive, the real one, was — our daughters, their future, their marriages, all that I had felt I could live for. If a man is in fault the world forgives; but a woman — her sins are visited upon the children, they remain forever contaminated. Therefore I sought to appear the guilty one and arranged to be surprised in the circumstances you have read about."

"And M. de Malville was willing to have a share in this farce?" cried Mme. Hulin with indignation.

"I see, madame, that you do not know very well this musician who has wandered by mistake into the law. He cares for nothing that is not Beethoven or Wagner. And he is very obliging, too, for the affair was quite as distressing to him as it was to us. At one time the Commissary who had been notified failed to appear, or my accomplice — I had to have an accomplice — did n't keep her appointment. Then it had to be begun all over again — and can anything more ridiculous be imagined than a lawfully wedded couple making appointments to meet at the other end of Paris to arrange another day and hour when I was to be surprised? We had chosen the Avenue de l'Observatóire, the upper end, where the shadow of the chestnut trees is coolest and most umbrageous. No one would meet us in that far-away locality and the meeting was absolutely necessary. Think of the absurdity of two people

who are suing for their divorce walking side by side, discussing and planning their deliverance. I, who am always looking out for novel situations, really believe that was one, surely!

"'Monday, without fail, and see that your fair one does not disappoint us!' my wife called out after me when we had shaken hands at parting; and I, not less cordial and determined: 'Monday, my dear, I promise you.' And indeed it was on the Monday following that the detective found me in the morning at the Hôtel d'Espagne."

"With Amy Férat, a vaudeville actress," said Mme. Hulin with a forced smile; "spare me the details — I know all about it."

"You don't know all about it; the papers did not tell all. Amy Férat, poor girl, had no idea of the wakening that awaited her in the morning — and although she was far from a paragon of chastity, I reproached myself somewhat at bringing her into this tiresome affair about which all Paris would be talking.

"But imagine, when a sharp blow was heard on the door in the early morning and a voice cried, 'Open, in the name of the law!' She sat up in bed frightened to death: 'My husband! we are ruined!' she cried. 'What do you mean — your husband?' 'Yes, I am married; forgive me for not telling you! Hide yourself — fly!'

"Well, here were indeed some awful moments! ignorant, as I was, if the arrest was to be for my adultery or hers. Happily I was not kept long in doubt. In consequence of this escapade I was

sentenced to pay fifteen hundred francs a month alimony to Mme. de Fagan and leave my daughters with her, on condition that they came to me for two Sundays in each month. It is very little, but I think their mother will gradually relax her rigor and send me the children oftener as they grow older and she finds them more in her way and would like to be rid of them."

"Never speak to me of divorce again — it is a contemptible farce!" and Mme. Hulin laid down her work, which her hands, grown awkward and trembling, could scarcely hold.

"Yet I ought to be very grateful to divorce; it has delivered me from the most abominable creature — "

"O, M. de Fagan, how can you speak so of one whose only fault was not understanding you perfectly! Misunderstandings, incompatibility of tempers — "

"More than that, madame, much more! I have often told you how pleasing to me are your uprightness, your sincerity of word and look — what used to exasperate me in my wife was her untruthfulness; she was false from preference, by instinct, *chic* and vanity — a falseness that entered into her manners and intonations, an alloy so amalgamated into all her actions that I could never tell the real from the false. 'Why are you laughing so heartily?' I asked her once when we were supping at a restaurant after the opera.

"'To make the people about us think that we

are enjoying ourselves.' That was an epitome of her nature. I never remember having heard her speak for the benefit of the person whom she was addressing; it was always for some one else near by, or some one who had just come in, or the servant who was waiting on us, or some passer-by whose attention she craved. Sometimes, suddenly, in the midst of a group of people, she would say with trembling voice and melting eyes, 'O Régis, dear, the Borromean Islands! — our wedding trip!' We had never known those islands, we had never been there. Imagine my surprise!"

Mme. Hulin tried to make excuses — "A pardonable weakness, surely, after all."

"Yes, but one that becomes most tiresome and most disconcerting, when you ask the companion of your life, 'Where have you been, what have you been doing?' and you know that there will not be a word of truth in her answers; that one of the million chances in Paris will reveal to you that she has lied — lied without reason and with an obstinacy and determination that neither prayers nor proofs have the power to check. O, her little sharp voice! — 'But I assure you — really and truly — you are deceiving yourself — or perhaps you are deceiving me.'

"The worst of it was that with age, with the assurance that comes with age, her lies became more venomous, more dangerous to me and to others. About her enemies in society she invented the most terrible stories, insane and

abominable, but which she ended by believing herself. She would repeat them with a calmness and gravity which disarmed all suspicion as to her mental condition; for that betrayed itself only by some uniform motion — a nervous twitching at a ribbon or a fold of her gown, which she pleated and twisted between two fingers for hours together. Society being only too happy to accept all the slanders that are served up to it, the injury that such an infernal creature is capable of doing is incalculable. How often at dinners have I learned to watch my wife from behind the baskets of roses and orchids between us! 'What is she saying? What is she concocting now? What poison is she pouring into her neighbor, this little monster, so well dressed in every particular?'

"At last I myself became her victim. Soon a story went the rounds of society about a Swedish girl, a perverted creature of sixteen or seventeen, who had turned my head to the point of criminal passion and caused me to detest my wife and children. 'If I die,' said the exquisite creature who bore my name to her female friends, 'if I die you will know who has killed me.'"

Pauline Hulin gave an exclamation of disgust. "Oh, it is dreadful!"

"Yes, dreadful indeed. You can imagine the reception I met with from my friends, indirect bits of advice, sad or reproachful glances cast on us or on me. Defend myself? I did not even try to. Who would believe that I knew no Swedish

girl, perverted or not; and that all this conjugal drama was the work of an hysterical imagination?

"So I resigned myself and continued to appear at all the first nights in my *rôle* of 'Bluebeard,' while at my side my gentle victim sighed and rolled up her dying eyes. Her friends believed her to be so unhappy that, notwithstanding the prejudice in French society against divorce, they all advised her to get one.

"'No, no, I will endure to the bitter end, for the sake of my daughters!' The fact was, she needed sufficient facts, and had it not been for the counsel of De Malville—"

Another cry from the little boy, louder than before, interrupted the conversation. The mother ran out of the room, but soon came in again looking very pale, with the remnants of a look of fear in her handsome eyes.

"What is the matter with him?" asked De Fagan.

"Nothing, or almost nothing; he is subject to a nightmare, from which he always awakes with this mournful cry, this scream of anguish."

Her poor little Maurice, so nervous, so delicate! She began to speak of him, of his health, of the wound on his knee.

"Was he born with it?" asked De Fagan, much touched by this motherly anxiety, of all others the deepest and most poignant.

"No, an accident, when he was a baby." And she said no more, absorbed in the painful remembrance.

CHAPTER III.

"No, my darlings, no, my little girls; what you ask of me is simply impossible. Do not insist — you pain me too much."

Insist? They knew better than to do that. At their father's refusal Ninette had taken a book and Rose a fashion paper, and their fresh, girlish faces suddenly became hard and expressionless; they appeared absorbed in mute attention, although at times a malicious and furtive glance shot out from under their half-closed lids. They were no longer two children with whom De Fagan had to deal, but two women with all the angelic obstinacy of woman that drives a man to desperation.

He strove hard, this poor father, to make them understand, to drive into their stubborn little heads the serious reasons for his refusal — a refusal to add to his already bounteous allowance.

Come, now — had he not, during the seven months since he had separated from their mother, sent regularly two thousand francs a month instead of the fifteen hundred allowed by the Court? So that was not enough — and they presumed to ask him for more when his only revenue came from his plays? He made no complaint —

his plays were the fashion, but his income might at any moment be cut down, depending as it did upon the whim of the public. And then he must also think of Rose's marriage portion.

"Indeed, my children, I think that on the Sunday when you come to see your father, one of my poor little Sundays, you have undertaken a very pitiful mission. Could not Mademoiselle have been sent or a letter written to me, to which I should not have been slow in responding?" It required this direct attack and their mother brought into the dispute to break the martyr-like silence of the two girls.

"But papa," said Ninette without lifting her eyes from her book, "we had no commission given us and this little increase that we have asked for was for ourselves alone."

"For our clothes," added Rose timidly from behind her large book of fashion-plates that hid her like a screen.

Their clothes! Fagan was amazed. Why, all the extra money for each month was meant for their clothes, not their mother's — and girls of their age and position should be satisfied with what they had. He began to go into the details of their expenses — dresses, linen, shoes and stockings, — unconsciously acting over again one of those wearisome domestic scenes of other days, only now he had two women to deal with instead of one. Recriminations followed, those of the younger clear and to the point, those of the elder the more irritating from the sweetness

and apparent innocence with which they were uttered. She spoke of a marriage about to take place that would necessitate of course —

"What marriage?" asked Fagan, startled.

The warning glance shot at her thoughtless elder sister by Ninette was not lost upon her father; he grew pale to his lips, even to his eyes, and cried out in a harsh, strident voice:

"I understand; yes, yes, perfectly; I understand — Mme. Ravaut intends to remarry — she has a perfect right to — to whom is she to be married? — may one know? — to 'Cousin,' not?"

The burning cheeks of the children, their evasive gestures, their embarrassment answered him better than words and made him more furiously angry. Not that he was in the least jealous of his divorced wife — but of his daughters! He was jealous of them.

He had always suffered from their intimacy with La Posterolle, the gifts and flatteries and favors by which he had managed to win their regard and attract to himself their pretty little attentions, the greedy little coquettish parrots that they were! What will it be now that they are all to live in the same house together, he with the authority and familiarity of a step-father? In the natural order of things, by his own efforts and being always there on the spot, he will soon become more their father than he was himself. The idea enraged him, especially when he reflected that his children might be taken out of Paris away from him.

"I like that — I like that!" he cried, stammering with fury, waving his long arms and clenching his fists with almost brutal menace.

But the anger of De Fagan, a Creole from the Island of Bourbon, was like a cyclone and passed over quickly though violently. After throwing down a few chairs, after opening and slamming the door several times, as if about to leave the room, he calmed down and stretched himself comfortably in a rocking-chair and made his usual request to Rose to play something for him on the piano that had been purchased expressly for her. Rose, unhappily, was suffering with headache — O, such a bad headache!

"Do, Rose; just some little thing — a bit of Chopin or Mendelssohn."

"I am sorry, papa — I really cannot." At the gloomy, implacable manner of her answer the father did not insist. There is no use in arguing with a headache.

Turning to Ninette he said: "Are you not going down to play with Maurice?"

"No, not to-day — I am too tired."

Her book grasped tightly in her hands, her brow knit obstinately, her self-willed chin above her neat little boy's collar, all showed that neither tender reproaches of her father, nor imploring glances cast up at the window by the little lame boy in the garden, so disappointed and so lonely, could shake her resolution. All day long Fagan struggled against his ill-humor, which was not only that of his daughters, but the

work of the absent one — invisible and therefore all the more powerful.

Really, what was the use of his divorce if he had to undergo the same scenes, followed by sulky silences, whose benumbing influence he knew so well? During the long and dreary afternoon he wrote several letters to Mme. Ravaut, but he tore them all up, finding them either too amiable or too severe. Finally, when his daughters left him with a frigid little kiss to join Mademoiselle, who was waiting for them below, he sent two lines to her mother by Rose, asking her to meet him to-morrow for an interview.

On the same Avenue de l'Observatoire where a few months before they had discussed and planned their divorce Fagan awaited his whilom wife, not without a certain curiosity. Often, when thinking of her, when he was alone at night, he had tried to bring her image before him; but having no portrait of her, he confused the outlines of her face, magnifying some of them at the expense of the others. Her image was no longer in his heart. When he saw her approaching, sweeping the dead leaves as she passed with her brown skirt, it seemed to him that she had grown taller; and while she remarked with interest that he had grown stouter, his complexion rosier and clearer, the delicate moustache and the hair about his temples turned somewhat gray, he was amazed at the change that her hair had undergone. It had formerly been of an undecided brown shade, but now luxuriant locks of Venetian

red threw over her face a warm glow like an Italian picture, deepening the color of the eyes, making the complexion clearer — a new beauty, in fact, touched up and flattered, completed perhaps by some cleverly concealed enamel.

Perfectly dressed as always, there was about her the odor of coquetry that always surrounds a woman who loves and desires to be loved — and she had also an air of assurance that the perfect independence of the last few months had caused her to acquire owing to the fact that her authority was now absolute.

"Divorce seems to agree confoundedly well with her," thought De Fagan, and he began his attack at once with great show of firmness.

"Why did you not inform me of this contemplated marriage? You know you promised to do so."

She smiled more broadly her wily smile of the olden time and gave that watchful look from under her half-closed lids like the "spy mirrors" in the windows at Berne. Dear me! nothing was decided; she was still hesitating. Did he think it a good move? "You know me, my dear little Fagan; you know La Posterolle — what do you advise?"

She spoke in a tone of sincere friendship and, walking beside him on the sidewalk of the avenue, instinctively she was going to take his arm; but with a recoil which was also almost unconscious he moved away from her and in order to escape from these questions, which he thought inoppor-

tune and out of place, he began to recall to her the conditions of their divorce: "Never to leave Paris, never to take the children away from Paris." The words trembled angrily under his tawny moustache.

She reassured him quickly. His daughters leave Paris? Not with their mother and certainly not on account of her marriage. La Posterolle, attorney to the Secretary of State and on the way to becoming a counsellor, had all his interests in Paris. She was too thorough a Parisian herself, also — and that suggestion reassured De Fagan more than anything else. He could not imagine her living in the provinces, cut off from first nights, from the horse-show and all the many other entertainments where one goes to see and be seen. And so, when she returned to the subject of La Posterolle and all the advantages to be gained by this marriage, he listened to her without offence and almost found himself giving her advice.

But the rain that had been threatening all day began to fall; an autumn rain, fine and penetrating. Great clouds gathered above the Luxembourg. They opened their umbrellas and then, finding that this kept them too far apart for conversing, she closed hers and walked close to his side, talking to him about their daughters. Her new position, should she decide to marry, would procure them acquaintances in official circles and they would marry well. The eldest was nearly sixteen. What could a lone woman, divorced,

hampered in her goings and comings and the persons she might receive, do to get her advantageously married? Rose and Ninette would both suffer from her isolation. "And you, Régis — do you not feel very lonely?"

She spoke these words softly, pressing close to his side to shelter herself from the rain that was now become heavier. A fine mist enveloped the avenue, the brown-leaved trees and the fine group by Carpeaux — a globe in revolving motion which the four female figures in bronze support with their slender but vigorous limbs. At times a couple driven away by the rain would rise from a bench and as they passed would look at them with a knowing smile — for how was it possible to divine the purpose that had brought them here or the relations that they bore one to the other?

And gradually the mildness of the autumn morning, the originality of their conversation that he had vaguely been fitting into a play, made him yield to the influence of her voice, although he knew her to be cunning and untruthful. After begging him to advise her, she was now advising him, and so wisely! She urged him also to marry again and not waste the rest of his life in solitude — agreeing that he would make a most excellent husband to a woman more amenable to his tastes and his ideas. Amused at the turn which the conversation was taking, he answered gayly, almost affectionately, when she interrupted him:

"What a pity that Mme. Hulin —"

"Mme. Hulin?"

"Yes, your landlady —" again the little tone of falsehood fluttered at the corner of her delicate lips. He started with a shudder.

"Then you know her?"

"Enough to know that she is exactly the sort of woman suitable to you."

"Then why do you say 'What a pity'?"

"Well, it is such a pity that Mme. Hulin is not a widow;" and enjoying his stupefaction, she continued: "you told the children that she is a widow — but she is only separated from her husband."

"What do you know about it?"

"My detectives!"

She laughed so maliciously that with a shrug of his shoulders he dismissed the subject of Mme. Hulin and her widowhood as if they were details in which he felt little interest. They continued walking without speaking; but the rain fell more heavily and the noisy exit of a crowd of students from a fencing-school suddenly filling the quiet street with laughter and scuffling, the charm of the early part of their meeting was broken, so at the next cab-stand they parted.

Why did he return from this interview with a sorrowful heart? He was certain now that his daughters would not be taken away from Paris and that this marriage would mean no change in his present peaceful and happy existence. Was it because memories of the past stirred within him, vague regrets at the sight of this rejuvenated

blonde become auburn, whose perfume of verbena he had loved so long? No, a thousand times no! The first surprise over, her crafty smile was enough to recall to him his years of suffering and weariness. What was it, then? What was this anguish that unmanned him? After a thousand evasions and subterfuges, he was obliged to confess that it was the knowledge that his good friend was a married woman. And deep down in his heart, as at the end of a long street, he seemed to see Pauline Hulin, somewhat short of stature, with her large, frank, magnetic eyes, her loyal manner, the comforting goodness that seemed to envelop her whole being — in every way such a contrast to the woman whom he had just left.

Evidently, unconsciously to himself, he had been forming plans in his own heart for weeks, all of which this thunderbolt of the revelation of her marriage had destroyed.

"Mme. Hulin is married!"

Was it true, though? Might it not be one of those pieces of romantic gossip that Mme. Ravaut was so fond of inventing?

But when he thought of it, the singular reserve with which his neighbor always met any allusion to her husband, dead or alive — although on all other subjects their souls met in a perfect intimacy — and certain things which little Maurice had said, had often made him think and wonder.

But why this deception in a creature all frankness and candor, which nullified her greatest

charm? And he had confided in her so unrestrainedly!

So all women are disloyal, then. It is better not to believe in any of them, or lend as little value to their words as to those of a child giving testimony in court.

His mind in a whirl of furious and contradictory thoughts, he reached his home, decided to have an immediate explanation, when he was informed that the knee of little Maurice had become inflamed in the last few days and that Mme. Hulin had sent for a celebrated surgeon; at that very moment a consultation was being held.

After his luncheon De Fagan went downstairs to ask after the little boy; he was not admitted. Annette the maid, who was also nurse to Maurice, told him with tear-stained eyes that they had decided on a very serious operation, that they were preparing the house for it and that Madame could see no one.

Then he asked if he could be of any use next day in holding the child or in watching him. Madame sent back word that she thanked Monsieur kindly, but that she needed no assistance.

How far away from him she seemed at that moment, the adorable woman! When her child was in danger, of how little importance he was in the heart of this mother!

CHAPTER IV.

If he had had any doubt left in his mind about his love for Pauline Hulin, his state of feverish anxiety all the next morning while the operation was being performed on little Maurice would have robbed Régis de Fagan of the last vestiges.

The affectionate, languid charm of the delicate child, his clever sayings, things that come into children's minds and almost cause one to believe that they descend from some magic planet where language is simple but experience complicated — but no, without the mother and the mother's anguish, which he was always picturing to himself, the child's suffering would not have sufficed to wring so profoundly the heart of Régis and cause him to suffer more and more as the possibility of danger became more imminent.

Anthyme told him that the case was a very serious one — a knitting of pieces of the knee-pan; and when the time for the operation came he walked softly up and down his room, unfitted for any occupation, straining his ears anxiously for any sounds from below, listening for a moan or a cry, as if the sufferer had been one of his own daughters.

Now and then his anguish bade him linger, he stood at the window, drumming mechanically with his nervous fingers upon the pane, when suddenly, as an autumnal blast drove the clouds before it and twisted the branches of the old elms in the garden until they whistled and cracked like masts, he observed in one of the paths a man of thirty-five or forty years, thick-set, with fiery complexion and bristling moustache, his stout figure buttoned tightly in a military overcoat, who looked anxious and preoccupied like himself and seemed watching with sorrowful interest, like him, the room on the ground floor in which the surgeons were at work.

Was it a sudden look of anguish on the man's face, or his standing bare-headed in the rain as if he were in his own garden, that suddenly caused Régis to think "The father, her husband!" and he no longer doubted when he saw Mme. Hulin in a long wrapper, her hair unbrushed, fly down the four steps and rush to the man, her face beaming with joy. She spoke quickly, probably to the effect that the operation was over successfully; and as she spoke, she raised her arms and pushed back her hair that the wind blew about her in a shower of curls.

Then, with a passionate gesture, the man would have taken in his arms her full yet supple figure standing out in relief as she made this very feminine gesture; but she slipped away from him and crying angrily two or three times, "No, no," and shaking her head, she sped away without looking back.

O, yes! it must be her husband; and, from the way in which he had tried to embrace her, a husband evidently still young and as passionately in love as on their wedding-day. Fagan could think of nothing else.

While Anthyme was serving his lunch he tried to learn something from him, but as usual, the fellow could give him no information. Red hair? — bristling moustache? — no, he had n't heard of any such party; but on the other hand the minutest details of the operation, the number of probes and sponges they had used, the alarm at one time for fear they had not enough chloroform; and when the others had lost their heads, how the mother had kept cool and encouraged all those about her — Anthyme was unwearying on these subjects. Still, if Monsieur desired, he had merely to ask Annette and the cook. . . .

"Wretch! I forbid you to do anything of the kind!" cried De Fagan, terrified to think of the fathomless abysses into which this fool might plunge him. So, burying in his own heart his sorrows and troubles, he went off to the Vaudeville where one of his plays was in rehearsal and felt a thrill of joy as he got into a cab at the Passy station to see the man whom he already called "the husband" jump as agilely as a young man into the imperial of the tram-car. Then he was not going to spend the afternoon with Mme. Hulin! So it happened that the actors at the Vaudeville remarked among themselves, "Our author is in good humor to-day;" and Régis

himself, as much amused at his play as if he had never heard it before, thought, as he sat in the prompter's box, "My actors are playing like angels!"

But on his return home disenchantment awaited him. Anthyme, proud and elated at having discovered something, hastened to say, "By the way, that party Monsieur wished to know about, who was standing, bare-headed in the garden—"

"Yes, yes—well?"

"He must be a very near relative of Mme. Hulin; he has just returned and is going to dine there. I should n't be at all surprised if he stayed all night there, for Annette—"

"Well, what does it matter to me whether he dines and sleeps here or elsewhere?"

Poor Fagan! it mattered so little to him that he could not eat a morsel of dinner, and all the evening, still incapable of doing any work or even of reading, he thought of but one thing: "Will the man stay all night?" And if he stayed, how could one believe that the husband of this radiant creature (for he could not doubt that it was her husband) could quietly share her vigil beside her and that she, in the happiness of knowing her child saved, should not pardon his father for all his faults?

He was livid with rage at the thought—he, the man whom the marriage of his former wife with La Posterolle had not affected at all! The truth was that he no longer loved his wife—and he

worshipped Mme. Hulin. There was no doubt about that now.

What should he do? Remain in this house? Keep up their present friendly relations? He would be too miserable; the rapid beating of his heart told him that. He must go away then, must leave this peaceful little house, so adapted to his work, must give up those happy evenings in the cheerful society of the mother and her little son.

He was roused from these reflections by an unusual commotion downstairs, hurried footsteps — a dispute in muffled tones — the loud ringing of a bell — the noise of a struggle in which pieces of furniture were overturned and angry imprecations in a masculine voice.

Fagan, who had sprung to his feet at the first sound, rushed out on the darkened staircase. At the same moment the door of the apartment below opened and the man came out in a state of fury, Annette lighting his way with a lamp that her trembling hands could hardly hold. On the threshold he turned and shaking his fists menacingly, he poured forth a torrent of frightful abuse; then, slamming the door violently behind him, he ran up the street. The maid bolted and chained up the door carefully behind him.

Fagan stood motionless a moment at the stair-head, a mute witness to this scene, undecided what to do; then, seized by an irresistible impulse, he ran downstairs and entered the drawing-room where he found Mme. Hulin, half sitting on the edge of a sofa, her hair in disorder, a look of

terror in her eyes, not yet able to control the agitation into which the recent scene had thrown her. A large wood fire alone fitfully lit up the room.

"Come in, come in," she said to him, stretching out her hands — they were cold and trembling.

"You called me — I am here," he murmured.

"Ah, yes; I have been dreadfully frightened," she answered in a still lower tone.

Not wishing to embarrass her by indiscreet questions, he contented himself with saying: "How is Maurice?"

"He is asleep — he is asleep, my dear one. He did not wake up, luckily — they had given him so much chloroform!"

"The operation was successful, then?"

"Beyond all our hopes."

Annette came in again and her lamp threw its cheerful light about the room. "No danger that he will come back; I have put up the bar and chain!" Then, seeing their neighbor, she exclaimed: "See there — M. de Fagan! Now we have no cause for uneasiness!"

When Annette had departed Mme. Hulin drew her arm-chair up to the table and motioned Fagan to seat himself on the opposite side; then, having recovered her equanimity, she smoothed her disordered hair with a twist of her hand and rearranged the modest folds of her woolen dressing-gown with its trimmings of fleecy lace.

"You will never guess who that man is — the man who has just left this house."

"Your husband, I suppose."

"You knew about it?"

"I should have preferred to have heard it from you, yourself."

"Listen to me," she said.

And on the same spot, with the same distant barking of the watch-dogs, the same thundering of the city trains, in the same dear little drawing-room where he had related to her his own sad conjugal experiences, Fagan listened to the sorrows that had befallen her.

Ten years ago she had married at Havre a naval commissary, but after four years she had been obliged to leave him. It had taken a world of patience to live those four years with such a man. He was not a bad man — O, no — neither dissipated nor given to gambling as so many round him were in the wild life of a seaport town; but so jealous, so brutal, so violent in the fits of passion which were of daily occurrence, fits that nothing could prevent or control, not even the precautions of the most discreet and the least coquettish of women!

If she danced at a ball, he made a scene when they got home — and such a scene! He always supervised her toilet before they left the house — severely high-necked dresses and sleeves down to her elbows. He criticised her manners — her way of dancing and saluting. If she did not dance he quarrelled with her for that. What a Bartholo's head he must needs assume while he posed as a martyr on the benches among the hangings!

Ah, poor woman, how she did dread the official functions to which her husband dragged her! It was not only when they went out in society of an evening that he kept this watch over her; in the daytime she had to tell him of the visits she had paid, all in the exact order in which she had made them, with all the details and the names of the people whom she had met. This tyranny pursued her even into her innermost being, where she kept her thoughts and sentiments hidden for herself alone. "What are you thinking about? Quick, answer me!" Even her sleep was not her own. She had to tell him her silent dreams, and he would fly into a fearful rage if she had not dreamed of him — for to lie about it would have been impossible to her.

During the four years that she had lived with this man she could not remember a single night spent without tears, without cries, abusive words and acts of violence in which the unhappy man would give way to his frenzy, only to grovel later at her feet, weeping and begging for pardon.

"I forgave during four years; and perhaps, from pride or pity or shame, or for the boy's sake, I should have gone on forgiving till now; but one evening" — her voice became hard and stern like the voice of another woman — "one evening the miserable wretch in one of his rages expressed a doubt as to the legitimacy of our little Maurice; he snatched him from my arms and threw him so violently upon the floor . . . Oh, my poor little boy! . . .

"From that day on he might pray and weep and threaten to kill himself and me also; I ceased to be his wife, I asked for a separation and obtained it. I left Havre at once with my child and came to Paris to live with my widowed mother who had been living several years in this house. To please her and by her advice I passed for a widow in the neighborhood. Parisian society of the old sort looks with suspicion on a woman separated from her husband, because, unless special research is made, there is nothing to indicate which of the couple has obtained the separation. This precaution my dear mother thought would shield me when she was no longer with me, when I should be alone in the world. And I must confess that my pseudo-widowhood has been of use to me in many circumstances —"

Fagan shook his head in protest, but coming quickly to the subject that was torturing him, he asked: "You have not availed yourself of the privileges accorded you by the law, since your husband has returned to your house?"

"He came to-day for the first time," answered Mme. Hulin with her candid glance. "Every New-Year's day Annette writes to let him know how we are, but we have not met before until this morning. I sent for him, not so much on account of the operation, which might have been fatal, as on account of a certain clause in our separation. Yes, Counsellor de Malville —"

"Malville — my wife's Wagnerite?"

"The same . . . he was presiding judge at

Havre at the time, as rabid a musician as was my husband — they were members of the same quartet. So, while he granted the separation entirely in my favor — how could he have decided otherwise? — he reserved to the father the right of directing the education of the child from the age of ten until the termination of his studies. Maurice is nearly ten years old now and the idea of losing him, of having him shut up in some boarding-school far away from me, nearly broke my heart. And he, dear child, he dreams of it every night, frightful dreams. I sent for my husband in the hope that he would take pity on our little martyr and let him stay under my care longer than the time agreed upon. At first I thought that I had succeeded when I witnessed his emotion this morning, hardly daring to kiss the child, who lay as one dead, his face pale with the effects of the chloroform. He came back in the evening and asked to be allowed to pass the night in the drawing-room, to watch Maurice, he said, in case my strength should give out.

"He spoke so tenderly, vowed to leave me my boy as long as I wished — he seemed to speak only as a father — that I consented to have a bed prepared for him here as you see. I was at the bedside of my child, the door was ajar, when suddenly the wretch entered the room and attempted — but for my repeated refusals and my violent resistance —"

"The coward!" exclaimed Fagan with livid lips. But her evident indignation reassured him.

"O, I felt all my old hatred of him surge up within me and I do not know what gave me strength to resist him, to repulse him, while I threatened to call the whole house to come to my rescue. I swear that that man shall never come near me or my child again!"

"You have the law on your side as far as you are concerned, but your child —"

"I have still three months before he is ten years old. If his knee is not cured in three months, I hope to obtain an extension from the law. If it should be cured, however, or if his father, aided by his friend Malville, demands his rights — I shall fly with my baby and hide myself with him in the remotest corner of the earth."

A silence fraught with emotion, a long silence, followed this threat of flight and of a separation on which already their thoughts seemed to dwell painfully. Suddenly Fagan said, as if thinking aloud:

"And, in fact, why should you not get a divorce? Having had one judgment in your favor, nothing would be more easy."

"What would be the use?"

He turned very pale: "The advantage that you could then marry again and in the man you love you would have a natural protector for yourself and Maurice."

"I marry again! I think my experience of marriage has been sufficient — besides, I belong to a family of very strict Catholics; my dear

mother called divorce a sacrilege and I was brought up with the same ideas —" She interrupted herself suddenly: "By the way — your wife. Have you seen her? I forgot to ask you about it?"

"I have seen her."

"Without emotion?"

"Absolutely. It was as if by chance I had met a discarded mistress in the street."

"That is what divorce has made of marriage!" murmured Pauline Hulin, blushing rosy red at hearing Régis say that he had met his divorced wife quite unmoved.

"But your wife — are you sure that she was not touched by your meeting? Is she still of the same mind about her new projects?"

"More than ever; and now that I am assured that my daughters will not be taken away from Paris, I am delighted at a marriage that separates me farther from that woman and renders any reconciliation between us impossible. See how much better my position is than yours! If you had your divorce, Hulin might marry again, have a home and children of his own and probably would leave both of you in peace."

"Yes, you are right," she said gently, pondering; "but I shall never try to get a divorce; it is impossible, quite impossible."

CHAPTER V.

THE posters at the Vaudeville for several days had been announcing the coming production of De Fagan's play. They were talking of it at all the theatres, at the clubs, on the "at home" days of the ladies, in official circles, in the cafés on the boulevards, and already there had rained upon the table of the popular author numberless requests for tickets for the first performance, enough to have filled the house several times over.

One Sunday when his daughters were with him and he was showing them his mail and laughing over the immense number of the requests, Ninette suddenly exclaimed:

"You know, papa, mamma would like a box for your dress rehearsal."

"Most willingly," responded Fagan, his face clouding over slightly, as it always did when they spoke of their mother. "But only on one condition, which is, that for that evening I wish you to be with me and not with her."

Rose, who was sweet-natured, was about to say "That is easily managed," when a warning glance from her sister stopped her; at the same time the little upturned nose of Nina objected.

"But, papa dear, you forget that at the rehearsal you will have to leave us every few moments; you will be needed behind the scenes and on the stage, and then we shall be left all alone."

"I have thought of that," answered Fagan; "we will take Mme. Hulin with us."

"Mme. Hulin? Not for the world!"

Rising to her feet, Rose, the gentle and pretty Rose, became almost speechless with indignation, her face convulsed with anger. No, no; not that; her father must not expect her to do it! Nothing would induce her to show herself in public in the company of that person.

Her father did not get angry; he suppressed, indeed, an inclination to laugh, for he saw his own nature and race and his whole island home in this tropical hurricane.

"'That person,' as you call her, my child, is a woman worthy of all respect, and I cannot see who, or for what reason any one, should have tried to make you dislike her. Besides, how can you think — you, my big daughter, my beloved Rose — that your father would wish you to associate in public or in private with a woman who was anything but irreproachable?"

But Rose did not weaken. "As you will; but I would rather stay away from the rehearsal, and so would my sister, than to go to it with —"

He did not allow her to finish: "Very well, my children; my rehearsal can get along without you, and as there is no reason why I should invite

the future Mme. La Posterolle, please tell her not to count upon me for her box."

It was the mother who angered him, for he knew well enough that it was she who encouraged this feeling of jealousy in Rose.

Kept advised by Nina, whose little weasel eyes, ever on the hunt, carefully noted the progress in the friendship between De Fagan and his neighbor, Mme. Ravaut exaggerated every little detail. For instance, the doctors had ordered that Maurice should be kept perfectly quiet; he had to be pushed about in a little carriage in which he lay at full length, and often De Fagan performed this service for him, wheeling him along the sanded walks around the house and about the circle underneath the big shade trees; or he carried him in his arms — and he only could do it — lifting carefully the little invalid, who had grown taller since his illness; in his jersey with its white collar, his face very pale, he leaned his fair head confidingly on the shoulder of his stalwart friend.

When Ninette described these scenes indicative of great intimacy, the mother, knowing the weak spot in her daughters, would turn to her eternal confidant, mademoiselle, and say, loud enough for them to hear: "You will see, he means to adopt that child and will only leave to my poor little ones what he cannot deprive them of."

Since then Mlle. Ninette, who was already a very grasping young person, conceived a deep

hatred against little Maurice, which she showed so plainly that he no longer dared to ask her to play with him, nor even to raise his eyes towards the window where he had always watched for her to appear. Rose, to whom money matters were much less vital, was managed by a different method. Very passionate under her gentle manner, and above all of a very jealous temperament, the idea that a stranger should occupy a place in her father's heart equal to her own filled her with rage. Nevertheless one thing about Mme. Hulin pleased her and that was the religious scruples that prevented her from seeking a divorce, although her married life was a most unhappy one. Still under the pious influence of her life at the Assumption, the young girl approved of this highly and said so in the presence of her mother.

"O, yes," sneered Mme. Ravaut; and mademoiselle, English and a Protestant, sneered with her; "we know all about these pious people — their religion prevents them divorcing themselves, but that is all it does prevent."

And Mlle. Rose, a modern Parisian, well informed though innocent, knew what these words meant and believed firmly that Mme. Hulin was her father's mistress; hence her indignation at his suggestion that they should go to the theatre together.

There was another Sunday spoiled — one of those precious Sundays when the father had collected delicacies for his children from one end of

Paris to the other, trying to recall the menus of dainty suppers to please his daughters, adorning the table with rare flowers and enlivening the repast with wit and clever talk to entertain his dear little ones, whom they let him have so seldom!

This time he was really angry with them, and this unusual anger served only to confirm Mme. Ravaut's calumnies. His landlady must have gained a powerful influence over their father, generally so quick to yield and own himself in the wrong.

He, looking at the pretty costumes setting off their angry little faces, could only think of the many sacrifices that he had made, above all, that increase in the allowance he had so uncalculatingly granted. And at the very moment from the garden rose the sound of the wheels of the little carriage grating on the sand and the sweet, perfect voice of Pauline Hulin, whose struggles and sorrows he knew so well and to whom his daughters showed such cruel injustice.

For the first time since the institution of the Sunday visits Régis and his children did not know how to finish the day together. So Anthyme took Rose and Ninette home in a carriage before the usual time had expired.

"Will you let me come to dinner?" asked the poor father of Mme. Hulin; but when he told her of the cause of his quarrel with his children, instead of gratitude he met only reproaches.

"How can you blame them for being jealous of

your friendship for Maurice and me? Nevertheless nothing could be more natural. In the first place I could not go to your rehearsal — how should I leave my little invalid? Annette is very devoted, but I could not leave him alone with her a whole evening. And then my heart is too heavy — I foresee too much suffering before me. Think of it, I am almost ready to hope that my boy may remain a cripple! It is horrible — but if he is cured, his father will come and take him from me. And you want me to go to the theatre in order to be amused? No, no; take your daughters into the box with you and come in after the play and tell me if you are satisfied, if your piece has been a success. I shall wait up for you — I promise that I will."

As she spoke always with sincerity, the words arising from her inmost soul with the quiet, irresistible impetuosity of a deep-sea wave, her friend believed her and obeyed her in every respect.

The evening of the dress rehearsal, while Mme. Ravaut, accompanied by her fiancé La Posterolle and one of his friends with the air of one used to these ceremonies, entered a box on the grand tier, the author of the piece installed his two daughters, accompanied by their wooden English governess, in a proscenium box. The theatre had a ghostly aspect in the dim light, through which could be seen groups of whispering shadows in the different galleries — critics, friends of the author and the theatre, milliners, dressmakers and dressers; from time to time, as a door would

be opened, the pink ribbons of the box-openers could be seen as they passed through the brilliantly lighted corridors.

"Well, it seems to be succeeding," murmured De Fagan, thrusting between the two radiant faces of his daughters his own pale face like that of a man condemned to death — a face with eyes that saw nothing and colorless lips — just as if it had been his first attempt at the drama.

"Succeeding? Just listen to that!" cried Ninette, not pausing in her enthusiastic applause of the second act, after which all the scattered groups in the auditorium came together to pour out a real ovation.

The tears stood in Rose's clear eyes; and in the box above, Mme. Ravaut, the glare of the lamps full upon her, leaning far out of her box, unhindered by the slightest embarrassment at her false position, grew pale with excitement, tapped the rail with her fan and uttered cries of critical approval: "Very good; how very pretty!" and exchanged glances of intelligence and approval with the people on the stage, exactly as if she had still been the wife of the author.

To be the wife of an author on a successful first night — that is something to flatter a woman's vanity! Certainly her La Posterolle could never offer her such a pleasure as that, nor her daughters either. So reflected Régis de Fagan and his satisfaction would have been complete could he have met in the shadow of the box the reassuring smile and felt the comforting presence of Pauline Hulin.

After the third act the piece, which comprised four acts altogether, had an ever increasing success. Fagan, intoxicated with that joy which never palls on men, wished to associate his daughters with his happiness and give their vanity a satisfaction they would never forget; so, opening the box door, he received all his callers in their presence — his friends, people asking favors, provincial managers and arrangers of tours as well as foreign correspondents, who wished to translate and put upon their own far-off stages the new play of the popular author. From time to time came boxes of candy and flowers for the young ladies, hands were extended, congratulations called in from the lobby, while Rose and Ninette, absolutely dazed by their father's success, had their part also in this homage — such pretty girls, each in her different way — Ninette with roguish, laughing eyes in her rose-leaf face — Rose tall, languid and drooping, pale in the light with the complexion of a Creole.

"My daughters!" said Régis proudly.

And beholding the two little Parisians gowned and hatted to perfection, all these loungers, journalists and stockbrokers with the temperament of gamblers exclaimed to each other enviously: "With mascots like these, it's no wonder he is lucky!"

Suddenly the enthusiastic group round the triumphant author opened a way for a woman conspicuously dressed; it was Mme. Ravaut, who ran forward, holding out her hand, and shaking

De Fagan's in a manly, comrade-like manner, cried out: "It is awfully good, my little Fagan — very good indeed!" Then, smiling radiantly at her daughters, she swept away, leaving a diversity of opinions upon her act, so bold and so unexpected, and a kind of stupor among the promenaders in the lobbies.

Some saw in it an impulsive movement, a piece of thoughtless enthusiasm, the love of art rising above the trammels of convention; but others, and Régis among them, recognized it as the act of one of those vain and worldly women who seek notoriety at all costs, wishing always to be "in it," insisting on giving themselves a rôle even in performances where they have no part to play.

"Awfully good, my little Fagan!" — he was still laughing to himself about it after he had put his daughters and their governess into a carriage, as he walked toward his distant home, in order to calm his nerves and the fever in his blood with the cold air of the calm winter's night.

He remembered by way of contrast certain nights when he had returned home with his wife after a play that had not been successful. How angry she had always been at him; with what a sneering laugh she had ridiculed play and author! How scornfully she shrugged her shoulders when he still had hopes! And then in the morning, when the newspapers arrived, among the pages of carping, ill-written and treacherous criticisms, how she pounced upon the vilest one of all, to

show him the most wounding passages and the cruelest, most cutting paragraphs!

Ah, what a base companion for a life!

Let her become enthusiastic and gush over her little Fagan to-day; he was glad enough to be able to go home alone, her dear Fagan, free under the stars, and to reflect that she was probably devoured with rage at this great and incontestable success that was coming, — a pecuniary success, too, such as he had never had in her day.

Several weeks after the first night at the Vaudeville, while the name of the playwright was still displayed upon the bill-boards and his portrait was in all the shop windows, the papers announced the celebration with great pomp, at the Mayor's office in the Rue Drouot, of the marriage of M. La Posterolle, attorney to the Council of State, to Mme. Ravaut. Two Ministers stood up with the bridegroom and two Academicans with the bride, one of whom had acted as witness at her first marriage nearly eighteen years before. Many fine toilets and handsome women. After the ceremony the bridal couple held a reception at their apartment in Laffitte Street.

"Answer me truly," said Mme. Hulin to Fagan when her lodger paid her a visit that evening, "has not what has happened to-day upset you a little?"

He swore to her that it had not affected him in

the least and added with a tender look: "O, how I wish that I could see you also set free! I know that I am still deprived of my daughters, but you will see that Mme. La Posterolle will hold less strictly than Mme. Ravaut to the exact words of the Court and that my children will be allowed to come to me oftener. Divorce, let me tell you, divorce is the only way out of the dilemma!"

But she shook her head with the sad smile of an unalterable conviction.

Nevertheless facts seemed to prove that Régis had judged rightly. Rose and Ninette came oftener to the Boulevard Beauséjour and did not confine themselves to the fortnightly Sundays. Sometimes the big one, sometimes the little sister, accompanied by mademoiselle and out for a walk, would bounce in suddenly and spend an hour or two with him; and although Rose still continued to refuse to know Mme. Hulin, Ninette was the first to express a desire to go down into the garden to play with Maurice, who was recovering so fast that he had given up the use of his crutches.

"It is strange," said blundering Anthyme to the old servant below, "but I can't get it out of my head that my former madame is using her daughters as spies to find out what is going on between my master and your lady."

It did not need much cleverness to come to this conclusion, but Régis, subtle observer and delineator of character as he was, like many of

his comrades put all his acute observation and complicated perception into his writings, and for use kept out just enough to manage his ordinary, everyday existence. So he did not notice the watch that was being kept on him and Mme. Hulin to determine the kind of relations existing between them; but all this was to be used in a way that he was soon to discover.

One morning early, just as he had seated himself at his desk, Ninette came in, her veil pinned tightly over her suspicious eyes, her little nose reddened by the wintry wind, one hand in the pocket of her jacket, the other brandishing her umbrella. An expression of determination and craftiness pervaded her whole person that made her look much older and brought out the likeness to her mother. She glanced round the room, and then, sure that they were alone, she began:

"A great calamity has befallen us, dear father. Just fancy, cousin (they still called La Posterolle by this title) has been made prefect in Corsica."

"He has accepted?" cried De Fagan, pushing his arm-chair several yards from the table with a violent blow of his long legs. The little feathered hat nodded a silent "yes," that cousin had accepted.

"Your mother has given her consent? Does she not remember our conditions?"

O the dignity, the gravity of Ninette as she answered: "Mamma is obliged to sacrifice herself to the future of her husband. Ajaccio is only a second-class prefecture, but will become a first-

class one on account of cousin. It is a spendid position for a man of his age."

She was a picture as she sat on the edge of a low arm-chair, following with the tip of her parasol the pattern in the carpet, raising her watchful eyelids from time to time to see the effect her words were having upon him. He understood why they had sent her to him instead of her elder sister, too simple and too natural to work upon his feelings and get him to consent to the very important request that Ninette was to convey to him. At the sight of this astute little gossip anger rose to his face as if he had suddenly found himself in the presence of his former wife.

"Let Mme. La Posterolle follow her husband to the ends of the earth, I care nothing about it — but she promised, she swore to me that she would never take my daughters away from Paris; that shall never gain my consent — never!"

He emphasized his determination with a blow of his fist upon his desk — one of those demonstrations that generally show weakness in a man and his powerlessness to hold out.

Mlle. Ninette calmly informed him that her mother, far from wishing to take them with her, had made arrangements for them to stay at the convent with the nuns of the Assumption, the two Sundays each month to be spent with their father.

"But you see, papa dear," glancing up at him from under her lowered lids, "it will be a great

grief for us both to leave mamma at the same time —and I have come to ask you to let one of us go, either Rose or me, just as you choose, especially as the position in Ajaccio is only temporary and cousin has a promise from the Minister . . ."

The little voice went on and on and grew shriller and shriller like the cry of a skylark, and Régis had but to close his eyes and go back ten years to many a dispute with Mme. de Fagan, worsted from the start by the volubility and utterly tireless obstinacy of his wife.

"I will see. I will think it over," he said rising.

There was no time to waste; before three days the appointment of cousin would be in *L'Officiel.*

"Well, my child, you and your sister shall have my answer to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER VI.

LA POSTEROLLE, who had now been in Corsica for three months, was considered one of the best prefects that the government of the republic had ever sent to Ajaccio; and this fine reputation was owing much less to his administrative abilities than to the three delightful Parisians, his wife and two stepdaughters, who were installed with him at the prefecture.

The sweet smiles of these ladies, who were always to be seen together in ravishing toilets, walking, riding or driving, had captured the heart of the town. The cigarette girls in the shops on the main street always ran to the door to see them pass, with cries of delight and admiring eyes, shining brown in their light-colored kerchiefs. These people of the South have so much feeling for grace and beauty! Then the prefect entertained a great deal; and his Saturday receptions, to which the squadron lying in the bay lent additional splendor, his perpetual entertainments, while they enlivened the somewhat dull society of Ajaccio, brought guests also from the neighboring cities—Bonifacio, Porto-Vecchio, Sartène, —gave employment to the florists and dressmakers, put new life into the hotels and thus

caused to be loved from one end of the island to the other the continental name of La Posterolle, still a novelty down there.

One lovely Saturday evening, one of those winter evenings in Corsica that are as soft and balmy as our May in France, just as the garden at the prefecture was being lit up with colored lanterns and the band from the flag-ship was installing itself preparatory to playing for the dance which always took place on the sanded paths among the orange and magnolia trees, Mlle. Rose, tall and very pale in her white ball dress, came running excitedly, looking everywhere for her mother; she found her in the drawing-room with some dinner guests who were just finishing their coffee. Calling her with a trembling gesture: "Read that," she said to Mme. La Posterolle, handing her quickly an open letter, the handwriting of which alone caused a cold shiver to pass over the satin shoulders of Madame la Préfète. As she read the latter asked in a low voice: "Has this just come?"

"This very moment, by a messenger from the hotel; he is waiting outside for an answer."

Forcing herself to be calm, the mother continued to read and as she read fanned herself violently; and yet the letter was a short one.

"I am waiting at the Hôtel de France on the Place du Diamant for my daughters to come and embrace their father. If they are not here in half an hour, I shall come myself to the prefecture to look for them.

"RÉGIS DE FAGAN."

A breathless "What shall we do?" fell from the painted lips of Mme. La Posterolle, while Rose said softly, "Poor papa!"

"Yes, pity him, do!" exclaimed her mother in such a strident tone of hatred that La Posterolle, crossing the passage from the parlor to meet the Admiral, who was just announced, stopped short. He read the note over his wife's shoulder and retaining all his ministerial calmness, his agitation shown only by a slight trembling of his long, pale fingers as he stroked his whiskers, commanded in a low tone: "Let mademoiselle take them at once, and as quietly as possible. What they must say you know as well as I do — the presence of M. de Fagan at Ajaccio makes the situation for us impossible."

As he spoke, gold-laced hats and uniforms glittered upon the steps of the garden. La Posterolle ran forward: "Welcome, my dear Admiral —" and the modulations of his orator's voice, the voice of a man of the world, were drowned by the flourish of the band from the "Redoutable" attacking the Marseillaise with an energy sufficient to have cracked all the instruments.

The ball soon began and while sounds of the dance issuing from the drawing-room full of blinding lights were soon lost at a turn in the garden with its perfumed shadows, Rose and Ninette, their long, dark cloaks over their low-necked dresses, slipped quietly away beside their English governess and walked through the shadow of the tall, dark houses to the Place du Diamant,

a square that deserved well its name that night, bathed as it was in the splendid light of the full moon, whose beams were reflected with metallic brightness on the dancing waves of the distant sea.

In all this fairylike brightness a dark figure could be seen walking excitedly up and down on the asphalt of the deserted square.

How had Régis de Fagan made up his mind to let his daughters go? And why had both gone when they had asked for only one?

This was the result of some advice given him by Mme. Hulin after the visit of Ninette.

"Suppose you do keep one of your daughters at the convent, as you propose to do, away from her sister and her mother, with her only amusement the two Sundays spent with you; will not your child consider herself a martyr and look on you as her torturer? No; since this woman, notwithstanding all her promises, is going to leave Paris and take either Rose or Ninette away from you, let her take both. Then you will be the one who suffers for their sakes, far away from them — you will reap the benefit of the separation, the afterglow of absence. Their love for you will increase and in her new home Mme. La Posterolle, still pretty and coquettish, with a husband younger than herself, will be the first perhaps to say to you: "Rid me of them," and your daughters will say also: "Take us back as soon as you can."

Consequently the two girls had gone, each promising to write to their father once a week.

At first the letters came very regularly; they were very affectionate, full of that gush from a distance which costs so little, giving minute descriptions of the functions in which they both took part — the arrival of the squadron, the visit of the "Redoutable" — very well-written letters, which the delighted father carried about Paris, read aloud at his club and to his friends at the theatre.

Then only Ninette wrote — Rose had gone with her stepfather on a tour of inspection; the next week no letter at all, only a telegram announcing that Ninette had hurt her foot while visiting an ironclad. A month passed, no letter and no telegram — only a note from mademoiselle saying that Nina had gone on a little trip to Sardinia and that Rose was ill of a fever. At last De Fagan lost all patience and threatened to go to them if they did not write at once; and since they did not answer, here he was, trembling with anger, shaking his clenched fists and arranging crazy schemes of vengeance, if his daughters did no appear at ten o'clock precisely.

"Good-evening, papa dear."

"O, my little ones, how glad I am!"

And the poor fellow, his arms widespread, his hands unclenched, pressed his daughters to his heart and to his cheek damp with tears. His Ninette! his Rose! He had them again, in spite of everything. What was the use of complaints and reproaches? they had such good excuses. "If you only knew!" . . . "You can't imagine." . . . "Ask Rose." . . . "Ninette can tell you . . ."

They had each taken one of his arms and held it tight against her and he let himself be guided outside the town onto the broad, deserted ocean drive, bordered on one side by the vast sheen of the sea and on the other by gardens, villas and family burying-grounds, whose monuments gleamed white against the dark hillside. Behind them resounded the masculine tread of mademoiselle, who kept near enough to overhear all that passed between the father and his daughters.

Now Ninette is scolding him gently for the imprudence he has committed in descending upon them so suddenly. What a scandal it would cause were it known that the former husband of the prefect's wife was in the city! "Think of it, dear little papa — in what a position you place mamma!"

Ninette, who is not yet fifteen, speaks with such an air of authority, she presses little father's arm so vigorously that he begins to feel that he has done wrong. "And for me and for my sister," the sly creature continues, becoming bolder as she feels him weakening, "what a position for us! No one here, or almost no one knows the truth; they think mamma was a widow and that we have lost our father." Fagan was about to protest; this idea of being supposed dead and gone offended and overwhelmed him; but Ninette always had an answer ready.

"You understand that in this country they know nothing about our theatrical celebrities — they are so behind the age in everything. And

you can imagine with what horror they look on divorce! It might interfere with Rose's marriage."

This time the father could no longer control himself. What! Rose was to be married and he knew nothing about it? But with a gentle pressure on his arm the elder girl reassured him. She was not quite married yet. A certain M. Rémory, a deputy at Bastia, wished to marry her; he was the son of a President of the Chamber in Paris, he was everything in the way of family that could be desired. This marriage was particularly pleasing to La Posterolle, principally because it would probably heal the feud existing between Bastia and Ajaccio, the magistracy and the administration. Nothing was decided, however, and M. Rémory senior, who lived in Paris, was soon to make an official call on M. de Fagan — if only the scandal of the latter's presence in Corsica should not get abroad and cause a rupture.

"But there shall be no scandal," said the father, touched, too, to feel that his big daughter was trembling against his arm. "Come now, tell me, has his honor the deputy already won your heart?"

And as Rose, instead of answering, seemed inclined to burst into tears, he soothed her gently and making her sit down on a slab of dry rock on the side of the road, he sat down very close to her with Ninette on his other side and mademoiselle standing sentinel a few steps off, erect as a coast-guard in the moonlight.

"Listen to me, my darlings," caressing gently

their hands as he spoke; "I am willing to own that my action was an imprudent one. But all can be made right. No one knows who I am at the Hôtel de France, no one knows my name. I can assume one and remain here for five or six days without seeing any one, on condition that every evening I may have a mysterious walk like this with you both, under the supervision of mademoiselle."

"But what will you do in the daytime?" asked Rose, touched at this great love unalloyed with selfishness — "if I could only come and lock myself into your room with you!"

"Do not even think of such a thing, sister," said Ninette quickly; "if any one should see one of us going into the hotel, we who are so well known! . . ."

"No, no, my children, do not worry about my days; I shall be studying up a last act that I am writing or I shall go out deep-sea fishing with the sardine fishers. I shall be perfectly content if I find my daughters here in the evening and can have a talk with them with this enchanting view before us. It is so lovely here — we are so happy — O, my darlings!"

It is true that an evening like this compensated him for months of sadness and loneliness. Ninette sitting on his knee, Rose leaning on his shoulder, before them the silvery sea, the boundless sea spread out along the coast and dashing itself with noise and foam against the shore. Far away to the right the winking eye of the Sangui-

naires lighthouse displayed alternatively a red and green pupil; and, brought out by the soft breath of the night in the lightly stirring branches of the trees, the sweet odors of orange and lemon trees were wafted to them from the Barbicaglia gardens, where the dull sounds of the ripe fruit falling to the ground startled them. "Listen! it sounds as if some one was walking over there — no, over there," and then they would laugh and draw closer together.

De Fagan, having registered under an assumed name at the Hôtel de France, spent the whole of the next day in his own room, except when he went out to take a bath. At the door of the baths, an establishment very little patronized at Ajaccio as in most of the towns of the South, he ran up against a young dandy carrying a light silk umbrella and leading a dog about the size of a rat.

"The devil take me! why, it's Fagan! Hello! how goes it, my pretty fellow, my old celebrity? That we should meet here — that 's what I call spicy!"

Much embarrassed at this greeting where he wished to pass unknown, Fagan hurried the young fool along. He belonged to the same club as Fagan, the "Cockchafers," and he had once played a small part in one of his pieces at a benefit, hence the familiarity of "my pretty fellow, my old celebrity." But in these circumstances and so far from Paris and its slang these words seemed to Régis pitiably ridiculous.

"I beg of you, Baron" — the father of little Rouchouze was a baron, and his son gladly borrowed his title from him, just as he did many other things — "I am here in the strictest incognito, and you will oblige me greatly — "

"Silence and discretion, old chap! Ah, it occurs to me — Mme. La Posterolle is your — then the young ladies at the prefecture, pretty Creole creatures — let me congratulate you, my dear man. Your daughters are quite the thing — and if the queen of spades had not cleaned me out, I should have asked you for the hand of the younger one — a little unripe still — but I like unripe walnuts."

With what an indescribable look did the father measure this squat little baron with a thick lower lip, whose thirty years looked like fifty — his complexion like a fish's liver, his manners those of an English coachman, an enormous carnelian boar's head fastening his blood-red necktie. . . . !

That thing a husband for Ninette!

He controlled himself, however, as he wished to secure the silence of the gentleman and asked him what had brought him to Corsica.

"To rusticate, dear boy; after a general smash-up at the races my dad has sent me back to my work in the Agricultural Department which I threw up at mamma's death; and here I am for an indefinite period of time in this land of brigands with only one hundred francs a month allowed me by the State and whatever I can squeeze from the fellows at a club of paupers in the evening, out of

whom it's hard work to make anything. Luckily, I still have the old woman's diamonds; and then I've brought Firmin with me, the old major-domo at the club, and he's a most resourceful creature and would never let his master die of hunger. Come some morning and breakfast with me — over there, look — that big tumble-down place," pointing with his parasol to a tall Italian house that rose precipitously above the black waters of the bay. "I've five rooms on the second floor with ceilings like the Place Vendôme — the above-mentioned Firmin to serve me, and my cook Séraphine, the beautiful wife of a mule-driver from l'Île Rousse, who is considered the best ballad singer in Ajaccio. Between ourselves" — here the baron lowered his voice with the most abominably fatuous air, and boasted that Séraphine was about to accord him her favors — the first of which, the most precious of all, had been permission accorded to her happy master and lord to accompany her to the bath, and he was now awaiting her.

"I need not tell you that I shall avoid this booby as much as possible," wrote Fagan on returning to the hotel, as he was describing his adventures to his dear Mme. Hulin. But, poor man, how mistaken he was!

He was dreadfully bored, shut into this room, in which the will of his daughters more than that of their mother kept him confined because they insisted that he should not show himself by daylight. A profound lassitude like a stifling mist

soon surrounded him, took away all his ideas and unfitted him for work. He got up late and watched through the half-closed sun-baked shutters a vessel entering the harbor, or a Neapolitan coral-boat with its tall, triangular sail spread out like a wing. He read without seeing his book and then, after three unsatisfactory meals bolted without an appetite, at last nine o'clock would arrive, the moment when his daughters would come to meet him on the Sanguinaires road.

Therefore it was that when on the following day Baron Rouchouze appeared with a new gambling outfit in his pockets and proposed a friendly game at a louis a point, accomplished card-player that De Fagan had been in his youth, the utter weariness of his days spent in the dreary hotel room revived his interest and the play began.

Think of coming three hundred leagues across the sea to live in that picturesque and odorous island full of beautiful rocks and woods, and then shutting oneself up with closed blinds and playing interminable games of cards with little Rouchouze — he, Régis de Fagan, the brilliant dramatist of the Français and the Vaudeville!

At six o'clock Firmin, shaven and in correct black livery from head to foot, brought a glass of vichy to his master, who, as he placed the empty glass upon the tray, never failed to make a signal to his majestic servant by rubbing his thumb quickly against his forefinger, which meant: "Lend me a few louis!" — for ill-luck pursued the baron, an ill-luck for which the only

consolation was that it granted him the honor of being beaten by Régis de Fagan the celebrated author; and then he counted on winning it back in the evening at baccarat from the club of paupers.

In the evening Fagan, with a daughter on each arm and before them the superb view of which they never tired, forgot the degrading dulness of the day. He was always the first to arrive; seated in the lee of a rock near the water, he listened for the sound of the little boots upon the road, the muffled laughter and the whispered conversation of the girls, who were delighted with the romance and mystery of these stolen meetings.

"It is like real lovers' meetings," whispered Ninette.

And Rose: "What! a lover with two lady loves?"

"Yes, three — there 's mademoiselle!"

Suddenly their father would show himself and then there were little screams of fright and long kisses and much chattering in low voices about the employment of their day, visits made and received, the trying on of their dresses for a grand fancy ball in character costumes to be given at the prefecture on Shrove Tuesday. Ninette was to be an Infanta by Velasquez with stiff petticoats of light colored satin; Rose, a noble lady of Venice, her hair dyed with henna.

"And to think that I cannot see you!" muttered poor Fagan, who was obliged to return home on the morning of Shrove Tuesday. "I am tempted to wait over one steamer."

. . . And to think that I cannot see you ! ' muttered poor Fagan "

He made this proposition timidly, having once already postponed his departure. But Ninette, always armed with orders from her mother, tried gently to turn him from his purpose. What good would it do him to postpone his departure? he could not go to the ball, nor could they come to his room to show him their costumes; and then as a last argument: "Besides, any day if people were to know that you had been here it would have a bad effect upon us. You really must go, little papa, for President Rémory is going to visit you to ask for the hand of your daughter and Anthyme can hardly—"

"Say no more; I will go," said the father in a voice whose grumpiness melted as he felt the pressure of Rose's fresh lips on his hand in silent thanks.

O, yes, she loved him well without any airs or subterfuges; Ninette loved him too, but she was still too much a child, completely under the influence of her mother and that heartless Englishwoman, that formal bigot, who from her first entrance into the family had shown her scorn of the husband as a Parisian Creole, indolent and sceptical, who was working for the destruction of souls by means of the theatre. On the tenderness of Rose neither high-church venom nor the mother's calumnies had any effect; he felt that she loved him utterly, and certain feelings of his inmost heart he kept for her alone.

One evening, as Ninette and the governess loitered behind, he tried to talk to Rose of Pauline

Hulin, of the pure and comforting friendship he found in that woman: "You have misjudged her, my daughter, but you will see; some day you will know her better."

Rose did not reply; her eyes were fixed on the changing star of the lighthouse with its winking light.

"Do you know," continued Fagan, "that had she been a widow, as at first I thought she was, probably I would have married her — would that have grieved you?"

"O, yes," murmured the girl with suppressed violence.

"And why?"

"Because I could not bear to have another woman come between my father and me — any other woman than mamma in our house."

"But your mother has married again; there is another man than your father near you in her house."

"O, but that is not the same thing, — or at least it is not the same thing to me."

Fagan laughed, half angry.

"You think, then, that your mother had the right to marry again and that I had not? You condemn me to the solitary life of a widower, while you will marry, you also, and then your sister. You all will have homes of your own except me — that is indeed feminine logic."

Rose crept closer to him:

"I cannot help it; I am jealous — I hated that Mme. Hulin the first time that I saw her. Yes,

I detested her when I thought she was — your mistress; imagine how much more if she should become your wife!"

He was about to answer, but Ninette approached and they spoke of other matters.

CHAPTER VII.

THE wind was blowing wildly on the Sanguinaire road, where foaming waves crushed themselves, making a long white moving border to the dark road; the place seemed darker than usual and more deserted. Not a star was visible in the sky; the agitation of the invisible moaning sea was only traced by the come and go of the recurrent glare from the lighthouse, appearing or disappearing like a lighted match thrown on the crest of the waves and held there unquenched as by a miracle.

"Are you there, papa?" whispered one of Régis's daughters, the noise of footsteps upon the gravel indicating the approach of some one.

"Yes, my children."

He was astonished to find them at their meeting-place before him and attributed it to the fact that, this being the last evening, they wished to be as long as possible with him; for he was going away next day at one o'clock on the "Général Sebastiani."

"What bad weather you will have to-morrow!" said Rose, shivering; but the younger sister did not desire to have any emotion shown: "Who knows? before to-morrow—" and catching her

father's arm: "Come, let us have a scamper; the mistral always makes me hate to keep still."

The storm seemed to intoxicate her. She forced her father and sister to run with her in the teeth of the wind and laughed as the spray dashed up on her. Then suddenly pausing: "Don't let us go too far, Rose; you know we have to get home early to-night."

Fagan was alarmed. "Home early — why so?"

"We have a rehearsal of our charade — generally a dress rehearsal. To-morrow night we make our first appearance."

He was shaken by a gust of anger, but he repressed it quickly, heroically, because he wanted to leave his daughters with a souvenir of his visit unalloyed in its tenderness. He only stammered, overwhelmed:

"It is not nice of you — just our last evening."

"Poor papa!" said Rose; but Ninette: "We got here long before you did — Rose will tell you. We had been waiting for you for at least twenty minutes."

Rose said nothing, feeling acutely how absurd and cruel was this calculation of minutes. All three remained motionless and chilled — no one could find a word to say. Régis de Fagan had never been so tired of life and of the struggle with his wife for the affection of his children as he was at this moment beside the dark and stormy sea. He felt like renouncing everything, his hatred for his wife and his affection for his loved ones. His father's heart seemed for a moment

to stop beating; it was a mortal moment, the anguish and supreme farewell as of death. A caress from Rose, who seemed to divine him, and some well-chosen words from Ninette roused him from this mental syncope; but he always retained the memory and the dread of it.

"Is it true, my big girl, what Nina is telling me? Have you not invented it to make our parting less painful?"

"It is perfectly true, Papa. M. Rémory has the promise of a position as deputy at Versailles. So the marriage will take place in Paris and you will have your daughter living quite near you."

"Besides," added Nina, "Cousin is very soon to be made Councillor of State and then we shall all go back to Paris. We shall see each other often. O, those delicious Sunday luncheons! won't it be delightful to have them again!"

"O, yes," sighed De Fagan, and, false or true, these hopes softened the bitterness of the separation and the farewells in the storm and darkness when he embraced his daughters without seeing them.

Rose was right. When he embarked the next day under a drizzling rain augmented by spray there was a tremendous sea on; the waves were high and rough even in the shelter of the harbor. The pier head had disappeared under the billows and the quays were inundated every moment by heavy masses of water which reached as far as the houses, whither the crowd ran laughing for refuge.

Many vessels came into the harbor seeking shelter — sailing vessels, steamers, coral fishers and fishing-smacks, some injured, all fleeing from the storm, that fierce battle of wind and waves, the continuous cannonade of which could be heard in the distance; and out there in the bay an immense transatlantic steamer was to be seen slowly advancing, which, as it rose with each gigantic wave, seemed to overtop the houses as if suspended in midair. When an immense steamer like this turned out of its course to seek shelter, it would have been no shame to the "Général Sebastiani" to put off her departure until the next day; but to have done this, she would have had to be commanded by a commander different from the dark, wiry little man with a profile like a turkey-cock, who strode frantically up and down the bridge with the stem of his red pipe clinched in his teeth — a pipe that made more noise than the smoke-stack of his vessel — a man who gave but one answer to the frightened passengers who came to him: "Let who will embark; as for me, *I am going with the horses.*" Forty Corsican ponies that he was taking to Marseilles were already stowed on the uncovered lower deck and were neighing with fright.

Fagan, who was a good sailor, having crossed many times from L'Île Bourbon, rather liked the idea of this sea-gull's trip, one wing in the air and one in the foam; and then to-day he felt lonelier and sadder than ever; he was in the reckless mood when a man courts danger, especially

on the waves, where death seems grander because more impersonal, a disappearance into the mouth of the darkness in a vision of the Apocalypse. So, while most of the passengers postponed their departure, he installed himself in the best of the first-class staterooms, and as the bell for departure sounded faintly through the storm, he went upon deck. The swarming quays, the dark old houses, the white watch-tower on the pier, all flew past and receded into the distance with springs and bounds, and the farther the vessel advanced into the broadening roadstead the higher and heavier the waves became, while the thunder of the breaking surf approached the nearer.

Soon the red rock of the Sanguinaires stood out against the black sky, the lighthouse on one side and on the other the Genoese Tower; and over there, under the dark trees of the Barbicaglia gardens, the road winding along like a ribbon made Régis's heart ache as he thought of his daughters and the happy evenings all too quickly sped.

Were they thinking of their father now, or only of the costumes they were to wear to-night in the charade? How pretty Rose will look in her Venetian costume, and how fascinating Ninette's little phiz in the satins of the Infanta! How he wished he could have seen them from some hidden corner, to catch even as brief a sight of them as the passers-by get of the hooded women going to a ball, as they descend from the carriages and run lightly into the house under the glare of the torches.

The shipping of a tremendous sea sharply interrupted his revery; it swept the decks from end to end, tearing away the benches and the bulwarks; and as Régis clung to the rail under the paddle-box, he was thrown head foremost down the stairs. A priest and two officers, who with Régis were the only first cabin passengers, picked him up and helped to dry his clothes; then, orders being issued to batten down the hatches, all four remained looking at each other in the semi-darkness of the musty cabin where the basins were rolling about on the sofas.

The screw had ceased to work. The ship was rolling from side to side with a long swing and in a silence that alarmed them. One of the cooks, with his face as white as his cap, looked in at the door, and clinging to the lintel exclaimed: "The main shaft of the engine is broken. They are trying to make sail to get back to Ajaccio!" The climax of the tragedy was reached when, on account of the violence of the sea, it was found necessary to throw overboard nearly all the horses, who, neighing and struggling with their legs in the air, their feet trammeled, made in the foamy wake of the vessel a black and terrible Montfaucon.

Night was falling when, by a miracle of skill and luck combined, the "Général Sebastiani," which had left Ajaccio a steamer, returned a sailing vessel. A purple twilight shining through the spray enveloped the city, where lights flashed to and fro, where songs and cries, drums, fire-

works, trumpets, hunting-horns and all the noisy carnival sounds peculiar to an Italian Shrove Tuesday filled the air, to which the booming of the angry sea played a solemn and continuous accompaniment. Fagan did not know what to do; whether to remain on board in the wet and disorder and with the deafening noise of the repairs going on in the vessel, or to go ashore and dine and sleep on this night of general masquerade and joviality, when his heart was still aching with the pain of parting. One was as bad as the other. The thought that decided him was that on land he was nearer to his daughters, the hope that he might at least see from afar the lights streaming from their ball-room, or perhaps by some lucky chance might embrace them once more.

He was splashing about in the mud on the quay which was still occasionally swept over by waves that looked livid under the lamps, when he ran against a man who was hurrying along with a bundle in his arms.

"Hello, Fagan! where do you spring from, old celebrity? I thought you had left."

"You see I have just arrived." And Fagan told him quickly his adventures. — "But you, Baron, where are you running to with that big bundle, like a tailor's boy?"

It is true that for a gentleman who, according to his own account, had so often ridden in races, to be seen carrying this large parcel wrapped in mohair was very much lacking in tone, and to

complete his discomfiture the baron suddenly remembered that he had let his "old celebrity" go away without settling a little matter of fifty or sixty louis that he had lost at their last game of *écarté*. "My dear Fagan, since you have no engagement this evening, will you not come and dine with me? — After dinner we can play a couple of hours, as the crowd will not come for me until pretty late." "The crowd" was a band of eight or ten young club men, who, in fancy dresses and masks, were to go from house to house, intriguing every one, as is the custom in Ajaccio on the nights of the carnival.

"I have just been getting my costume of Mephistopheles — take care of the two steps, my dear fellow — here we are at home."

Going up the stairs of the old house, whose steps and walls were streaming with moisture, Fagan, who was following and listening silently, suddenly asked Rouchouze:

"Are you going to the prefecture among other places to-night?"

"To the prefecture? Certainly we are; there is to be a ball there and a play."

"If that is the case, my dear Baron, try to get me a costume and take me with you."

"Nothing easier," replied the baron, whom this service put at ease with his creditor. The Italian troupe at the Grand Theatre was devoted to him; he could get from the basso Deodato — no, better still, from the baritone Paganetti, a big tall fellow like Fagan — some kind of a costume.

— "Ah, here is Firmin. Firmin, lay another cover. This gentleman will dine with me."

The dampness of the stairway seemed to have penetrated the apartment with its high ceiling and fine, simple old furniture, which the baron hired from the widow Limperani, the mother of a navy chaplain away for a term of years. Shells, exotic plants, dried coral, a miniature frigate on the mantelpiece, sacred pictures on the walls and everywhere crochet-work — on the backs of the faded arm-chairs, on the cracked marble of the table; before the chairs bits of carpet that hardly hid the worn-off red of the tiles. All was cold, badly lighted, uncomfortable, and seemed the more poverty-stricken from the strong smell of fried onions coming from the kitchen. The contrast between this lodging and the pretensions of the lodger and his stately butler was amusing.

Firmin seemed more embarrassed than his master at introducing the Parisian to the poverty of their surroundings; to disguise it he redoubled the dignity and ceremoniousness of his bearing, announcing: "M. le Baron, dinner is served," with much unnecessary solemnity, for they were ushered into a dining-room without a fire, without curtains, with high dark windows, through which could be seen the glimmering lights in the harbor. On the dreary-looking table smoked a tureen of onion soup between a dish of boiled fish and the traditional curds, the *bruccio*, without which no Corsican dinner is complete. O, yes, the dinner was served; but very pitiful it was.

The baron, however, swelled out his ruffled chest and winked his impudent little eyes as he recounted from one end of the dinner to the other his innumerable successes with the fair sex of the island in all conditions of society.

"By the way, how about Séraphine?" asked Fagan as they went into the drawing-room, where coffee was served on the card-table among the chips and packs of new cards.

"Séraphine? O, more than ever — an ideal woman, you know. One has to come for that to Corsica — a poetess, cook, the legs of Diana and does n't cost me a cent — but wait a moment, my dear boy, you shall judge for yourself."

She came at her master's call, a tall, robust girl with large waist and stout but well-formed legs showing beneath the scanty folds of her petticoat.

"Do take that off," said the baron, lifting up the kerchief that she wore on her head that partially concealed her face. Her low forehead was marked by a long scar, her eyes were brown and her large features hard and regular.

"I congratulate you, my friend," said Régis, in answer to the significant "Well?" of his host. "But whence comes that fine scar above her eyes?"

The woman understood. She said proudly: "*U cultellu di u maritu*" (my husband's dagger).

"Yes, my dear fellow, that brute of a mule-driver in a jealous rage — with a slash of his knife — poor old girl — there!" The baron caressed

her hips with one hand while he shuffled the cards with the other, impatient to win that revenge for which he had lured Fagan to his den.

The bell rang violently. "Your costume, probably," said Rouchouze; but he suddenly turned pale as heavy footsteps were heard approaching and a coarse laugh that echoed through the corridors and then the kitchen as Firmin escorted the newcomer thither.

"*U maritu!*" murmured Séraphine as she hurried back to her kitchen range while the baron whispered to her as she passed him, "Give him a good dinner."

"You seem to be disturbed," said Régis to his host — "is it a visit from Othello?"

"No; but the brute always wants some money when he comes."

The sound of heavy nailed shoes echoed through the corridor; a rude blow was struck on the door. "Come in," said the baron almost without a voice.

A smooth-shaven giant entered, a *pelone* over his shoulder, a scarlet neck-kerchief tied loosely about his powerful, round neck, which the blazing sun of the mountains did not seem to have power to tan; a broad chest, hard as a slab of marble; enormous hands, a conspicuous part of his personality — earth-colored hands turning and twisting an old cap that smelt of wild animals and forests.

"What news, Master Palombo?"

"Nothing good, Mister Baron"—and in a calm

tone the husband of Séraphine proceeded to relate how two of his mules, magnificent animals, had been caught in a frightful rain-storm on Mount Rotondo, had met a cold streak later — and *couic!* they had both of them died of a *pountura*—inflammation of the lungs. They must be replaced at once or he would lose all the traffic of the season; it would mean the ruin of himself and his brothers. But where should he find enough money for that, *péchère?* So then, he had bethought himself — Séraphine had said that monsieur was so kind to her!

As the man spoke his cunning little eyes, buried in folds of skin like those of an elephant, were fixed upon the arm of the chair in which the baron was lounging and on which lay the kerchief which Séraphine had forgotten to take away with her. As his voice became sharp, almost insolent, notwithstanding his flattering words, the baron, noting the direction his looks had taken and the tone of menace in his voice, was as much upset by this bit of silk as if he had been discovered with Séraphine on his lap. He quite lost his presence of mind and, stammering with fear, asked how much his good fellow, his excellent Palombo, needed to replace his pair of mules.

"Eight hundred francs, not a scudo less!" Here the mule-driver, who had reserved this effect for his grand climax, stretched out his hand and in a severe tone cried: "Why, this belongs to Séraphine!"

The baron changed countenance and turning to,

Fagan whispered hurriedly: "For pity's sake, old friend, lend me forty louis; you will save me from a catastrophe."

He took the blue banknote that Fagan handed him and gave it to Palombo with an easy, reassured air.

"There are eight hundred francs to replace your mules, my boy, and the rest is for your wife."

The ruffian pocketed the money, returned thanks and then went back to the kitchen, whence proceeded for a long time afterwards the noise of laughter and the sputtering of something frying.

After this assault the baron wished to continue the game, but his partner, throwing the cards on the table and clasping the baron's hands in a friendly, almost paternal manner, said, "No, no, my child, let us stop now, I beg it of you."

"But — my good friend — "

"Yes, I know, you want your revenge; but I have something better to propose. The money that I have won from you in the last ten days weighs me down — that is the reason that I was so ready to help you just now. Let me add to that sum a few thousand francs that your very bad luck — "

"O, M. de Fagan!" stammered the poor devil, his lips trembling with emotion. "If you only knew what a service — "

And without finishing his sentence, and letting his mask of dandy fall, he buried his face in his

hands and wept aloud like the grown-up baby that he was. Suddenly the sound of horns blown beneath the window roused him. He sprang up, his eyes already dry.

"Here they are!" he cried; "we must dress quickly;" and, his legs encased in tights and arranging on his head the little Dantesque cap of Mephistopheles, he murmured in real earnest: "Dear old Fagan, all the same, what a good chap he is!" but Fagan did not reply, for he was busy arraying himself in the parti-colored dress and the cap and bells of a clown lent by the baritone Paganetti.

In the darkness and shadow of the quay young maskers in various colors were flitting hither and thither, all of them using the jargon and slang of the clubs and stables, like little Rouchouze who was their model and instructor. Rendered grotesque by the native accent, their speech had the effect of Parisian gowns on women of Tahiti.

"My friend Rigoletto," said the baron, presenting his guest.

"On the lookout for his daughter," said Fagan, to say something; and the baron whispered in his ear: "His daughters."

"Why! That is true — I never thought of it." And the father smiled at the strange coincidence that had provided him with a *rôle* so in sympathy with his situation.

"Where do we begin?" some one asked. Fagan, who did not wish to stay out all night, answered: "At the prefecture."

They had only to walk through two or three narrow streets, very gay notwithstanding the darkness, escorted by street boys with colored lanterns, who repeated constantly a local catch: "*O Ragani! O cho dotto! O Ragani! O cho dotto!*" and they arrived at the prefecture just as the charade was finished. Joyous was their entrance into the big drawing-room in the midst of the hubbub of people, who, having been seated for two hours, were glad to be able to stir about again and converse.

People hailed with merry cries and laughter the many costumes, the clash of colors and jewels and feathers; and while some one went to inform the master and mistress of the house of their arrival, Fagan satisfied himself before a tall panel mirror of his completely transformed appearance, of the security of his incognito under the black velvet mask edged with lace and the enormous ruffle rising to his chin. No, his ex-wife herself would not recognize him. He gave himself up, therefore, to the boyish enjoyment of his adventure, to the delight of surprising his daughters in the very social pleasures that were forbidden to him.

One by one, the baron in the lead, the crowd filed past M. and Mme. La Posterolle and then proceeded to march round the rooms between two rows of guests. When Régis, who was the last to pass, paused before his wife, he had some difficulty in recognizing her. She had grown stouter since their last meeting and her hair had again

changed its color, being now powdered, making a charming contrast with her still youthful neck and arms and the infantile expression that increasing plumpness gave to her face.

But he found her still the same in her furtive smile, in which her eyes answered her mouth with keen and subtle sympathy. The sight of that smile caused him an involuntary shiver — he had suffered so much from her and she was capable of making him suffer so much still! Having bowed to the floor before her without daring to look at her, he passed on to M. La Posterolle, that haughty mask of an imbecile, that empty and resounding gourd, whose head had replaced his on the pillow of Mme. Ravaut.

"Surely I know those eyes," thought the prefect's wife as the crowd passed on, and turning to her husband: "Who is that?"

"Don't know," he answered evasively.

Between two hedges of bare shoulders, flowers and feathers, black coats, gold lace and aiguillettes, Fagan, as he passed along, heard only the murmured question that followed him: "Who is he? Who is he?"

Notwithstanding their clever disguises, their feigned voices and walk, they recognized all the others; it was no use for them to deny their identity with nods of the head — they called them all by name.

"O Tché! O Pé! Ho, Forcioli! Good-evening, Baron!"

But the big one, the last one, who never spoke,

only shaking his bells in people's faces — who the devil could he be?

As for him, he thought only of his daughters and wondered why they did not appear. Where were they? Perhaps changing their costumes after the charade. He was wondering how he could wait for them much longer surrounded by this dangerous curiosity, when suddenly they appeared at the entrance of the second room — together, his Rose and his Ninette — and how enchanting they were!

Drawn along in the procession that he could neither hurry nor break from, as he passed his younger daughter he whispered in her ear, "Good-evening, lovely Infanta," so softly that the girl's heart trembled under the satin bows of her long corsage and, guessing at the truth, she sought her father's eyes, but they were turned away in search of her elder sister.

Her golden hair floating to the hem of her thick damask petticoat, Rose stood looking at the maskers, leaning on the arm of a handsome young man, very youthful in face and most solemnly bald, the image of an embryo magistrate, when suddenly she felt upon her gloved hand a soft caress from a velvet mask, and a loving voice, the voice of one she knew was far away, one who had sailed the day before, murmured "Good-night, lovely Dogess!" Greatly agitated, she was about to answer, but the bells of Rigoletto, that had rung so near her a moment ago and then sounded wildly above the crowd, had disappeared in the

direction of the garden. Wishing to learn the truth, she sought everywhere for Ninette and found her in the drawing-room in deep conference with their mother, who was pale under her rouge. With her most evil smile, her barblike smile she said in a low tone, as if addressing her fan: "I shall be revenged for this, my children. I swear to you that he shall pay for this."

The band struck up a waltz, there was a general movement of invitations and taking places, and the three women, mother and daughters, variously agitated by different feelings, were whirled off into the cadence of the dance.

CHAPTER VIII.

On his return to Paris Régis de Fagan had a most cruel blow in finding the shutters of the apartment in the ground floor closed and the garden deserted. Pauline Hulin and her family had gone away, but Anthyme, who saw them go, could give his master no information as to their destination. Annette the chambermaid had said to him: "We are skipping." "Where to?" "To Havre." And that was all.

Fagan could not believe it. To Havre? — why should she go to Havre when her husband lives there? "But her husband came here," said lumbering Anthyme, "though Annette thought he had come to take away the boy — but he went away alone and madame followed him two days later."

What could he think?

In his misery Fagan passed several days without leaving the house, hoping to receive a letter, or that some morning on opening his window he might find little Maurice in the garden looking up to the window of his friend. But no, the garden without the little boy playing about it seemed each day larger and more deserted, and in the circular avenue, where he and his beloved

Pauline had so often walked, exchanging comforting and never-ending confidences, weeds were springing up between the pebbles, telling of absence and neglect.

Once, when his servant entered the room abruptly, Régis's heart gave a great bound. He thought Anthyme had brought him news.

"No, monsieur; but here is something more strange — the morning papers announce that you, monsieur, have gone insane!"

Having said this in the injured tone which he always used when speaking to De Fagan of his unsuccessful plays, the servant opened the window curtains and showed his master the paragraph, published in the two widest read newspapers in Paris. In almost the same words they announced that as the result of malarial fever contracted in Corsica the celebrated dramatic author Régis de Fagan had become insane; the first symptoms of the malady had been observed at a ball at Ajaccio.

"Oh, the jade!" cried Régis, for he at once recognized in this the inventive genius of his wife, and at once in his anger, giving to Anthyme several contradictory orders in a brutal tone not habitual to him, he found the eyes of the simple fellow fixed upon him in some alarm, as if he were thinking: "Has monsieur really gone insane?" It was a swift lesson to him, this look of his servant, and he promptly made up his mind how he would act in public. Yielding to his headlong nature, he went off furious, brand-

ishing his cane, to the newspapers and demanded retraction of the article, but he did it in such a way as to justify the abominable story they told; yet on the other hand it would not do to appear too calm, too indifferent, for they would not fail to call that unnatural apathy.

At the two newspaper offices they made very flat excuses. The news had been cabled to them from Ajaccio itself. They would print a retraction in the next day's paper and if he desired it they would put detectives on the case. What was the use of that? It would be lending too much importance to a childish trick, a mystification — and in the offices of the papers his words, "a childish trick, a mystification," were repeated whilst searching the depths of his eyes as they observed his words and actions. Ah, that wretch knew how to poison everybody about her. One could defend oneself against any other calumny, produce proofs — but this one!

All day long Fagan showed himself in the streets, every one surprised that he should be at large in the light of day among the free and the living. Had he found means to escape? At his club they gave him a welcome too cordial, too demonstrative, like that to a friend whom they had hardly hoped to see again. He ate his dinner, was clever and entertaining, promised them a new play for the next annual festival — then, having looked in at two or three theatres, he returned to the club at the hour when the young dandies, pals of the Baron Rouchouze, came

to seek their luck, and remained at the gambling-table until morning in order to prove undisputably that he was not mad.

When he returned home he opened his window that looked out upon the garden; day was breaking. In the top branches of the great elm-tree, almost invisible, a blackbird was singing in the mist, in which the sharp tip of its beak seemed to trace in arabesque the lines of its song.

Fagan sat sunk in his thoughts, despondent and weak. How alone he had felt in Paris, this Paris through which he had been wandering all day! How many faces of men and women, and not one creature belonging to him among them! Was it a feeling of utter discouragement, or only the chill of the morning dew that had saturated the thin cloth of his coat? He shivered and closed the window, suffering from an indescribable wretchedness, that, far from making him wish to forget it all in sleep, seemed to overexcite his brain, and caused him to begin a long letter to his elder daughter, the only being to whom he could open his heart and who could restore to him the desire to live.

"I do not wish, my dear Rose, to let you suffer for a single day under the horrible news that you will have seen in the papers this morning. No, thank God, neither madness, nor a threatening of madness; your father is as you have always known him, clear of mind and clear of sight, one play half written, and several more floating about in his head. It has only cost me a day and a

night, showing myself to all Paris at all hours and in all places to establish the proof of my mental equilibrium. The papers will retract the story to-morrow and then it will be forgotten. The mistake made by those who have tried to drown me in this sea of lies was that they believed it possible, at this age of the world and with a man of such wide-spread reputation as mine, to repeat the adventure of the unfortunate Sandon, the lawyer who was unjustly declared to be insane under the second Empire and was kept in an asylum for ten years.

"Ah, had I been revengeful, had I instituted an investigation, as they suggested, into what a trap these malicious fools would have fallen — but life is not long enough for hatred. . . . I have worked hard all my life and it is a great blessing, you see. I am so lonely. I have no longer my neighbor even, who once made this big house seem less desolate. Mme. Hulin has gone away, taking her son with her, doubtless in order to escape from the effects of the iniquitous law which would have taken him from her to give him up to his father. And yet this Councillor de Malville is an upright man. How did it ever occur to him and his coadjutors on the bench, when they had granted the decree of separation, to add to it this frightful clause, that from the age of ten and until his education was completed he should be under the authority of his father? What a prospect for the poor woman! to always fear lest her delicate child shall be sent away to some distant college, some unusually severe institution away from the protection and the tender care of his mother. Who knows, they may discover in him wicked and rebellious instincts requiring his confinement at Mettray, that prison that they call a family school, or they may send him to the school of naval cadets, and then comes parting — exile! Poor Mme. Hulin, I can well

understand why she has carried off her child and hidden in some remote corner of the earth.

"In the mean time, here am I deprived of her sweet womanly friendship, which every day became more precious to me. Even little Maurice with his affectionate prattle amused me; with his childish precociousness developed by illness, his pretty ways, his girlish sweetness, he reminded me of you at his age, on the days when you remained indoors with a slight cold, and would come into my study with your book to read beside my table. How proud you were to help me by bringing me big books that almost pulled you down, how useful you were in handing me my pens and pencils! And Ninette, do you remember her sitting on the floor, no taller than a cabbage — how she would "put papa's library in order," getting the books all crooked on the shelves, upside down, the authors mixed and the volumes misplaced — a touching confusion that I would not allow Anthyme to disturb?

"Well, these sweet follies, these memories stored in one corner of my heart, the voice of little Maurice awoke again; I never would have believed that I should miss him so.

"It is a sign of old age, my darling! Yes, yes, old age! I am nearly forty-five, the age at which men cease physically to live on their income and begin to draw on their capital of years and strength. Strength does not renew itself, every sorrow leaves its mark, every emotion weakens and exhausts the vital force. It is sad to contemplate, my darling, but the best part of my life is over, my greatest successes achieved; now begins the decline of courage and opportunity, and behind me, treading close on my heels, a younger generation ferociously greedy and in haste. Ah, one soon grows an old hack

in these days, and when one is an old hack and worn out it is hard to have no hearth and no family. At this hour, as I write, weary from my night at the club, with the garden veiled in the morning mist before me — if you only knew how melancholy my 'home' seems to me and how sweet it would be to have some loved ones slumbering in the room next to mine, a wife and children whose slumber I should fear to disturb if I walked too heavily! But I have nothing — no one, not even down below.

"You will say that I had a home and a family and that I did not know how to keep them; but whose fault was that? I never complained, I never spoke slightingly to you of your mother, although she did not observe the same reserve. But you ought to know the extent to which I sacrificed myself and how unjust it is, notwithstanding the verdict of a fool of a judge, that I should always stay lonely, always lead a solitary life, while my wife. . . . O Heavens — what a way to speak to you of magistrates, my big Rose, when you are about to marry one and a very good-looking one, he seemed to me, when I saw him in your drawing-room Shrove Tuesday night.

"His father also who came to see me day before yesterday pleased me greatly — a big man, not too stately for a president, witty, with clever eyes, a long white beard which shocks the Supreme Court immensely and democratic opinions to which he owes his phenomenal advancement. Quite penniless, it is true! He is very much pleased that I have been looking after my Rose's dowry for years. Without going into particulars I will tell you that I give you the proceeds of my two most lucrative plays, *The Enchanted Gardens* at the Opéra Comique and *M. and Mme. Dacier* running at the Comédie Française, the income of which is at least twenty thousand francs a year.

"The father of your Gaston seemed satisfied. I showed him the album in which I have your portraits and those of your sister at different ages; he was delighted and at once spoke about Ninette for his younger son, who is preparing to enter Saint-Cyr. So be perfectly happy, the affair is settled, unless I learn from Garin de Malville, with whom I have an appointment, that M. Rémory senior is an escaped convict from Noumea shot into a presidency for extraordinary services. I ought to have found out about that first, but this Malville, the only judge of the Supreme Court of Paris whom I know, has gone down to Lille, where he is getting up a Wagner festival and will not be back for several days. And then, when all is settled, my children married as soon as possible, I will tell them of a project, of a vision that haunts me — but why not tell it to you at once, on condition that you will let it remain a secret between us, if you think the idea impossible of realization?

"What would you say to all three of us going to Versailles to live? Gaston Rémory it seems will be made deputy in a few weeks. Why not be married at once and rent a pleasant two-story house near the park between the gardens and the Court? I will live on the second floor, you on the first, each with separate household, separate kitchen, only dining together in the large dining-room on the first floor. Think how happy I should be? — my daughter beside me, where I could hear her footstep, her voice, her laughter, and so buy back some of the melancholy days spent so far away from her. And then it would be very convenient for you!

"Your old father would not be in the way. If you want him, tap on the ceiling; when he feels that he is not wanted, he will go upstairs again. And when the baby comes, how delightful it will be, when you wish to go out

in the evening — who will look after the house, the baby, the servants? Grandpapa!

"And all this time, away from bores and borrowers, far from actors begging for a part, from directors who worry and hurry on the play which he is writing, the happy grandfather will write in peace and quiet to make a dowry for Ninette. Surely I shall be happier than I ever was before in my life, and, knowing the noble heart of my daughter, I feel that you will be happy in my happiness."

Rose answered her father's letter by return mail.

"It made us very happy, my dear father, to learn of the mistake made by the newspapers and that you have had no trouble of the brain — but you must let your big daughter scold you a little and you must confess that if your mind is quite clear, your conduct is hardly that of a serious person. Your appearance on the night of Shrove Tuesday at the prefecture with those young men was certainly an offence against propriety — you can't deny it — and mamma and cousin whom you placed in such an equivocal position had cause to resent it. Pardon me for saying it; but at your age such proceedings are somewhat too theatrical. This was Gaston's idea, but he is really devoted to you and admires your plays immensely. Now really, for you to run about the streets masked with little Rouchouze and to venture to penetrate into a house that you had every reason to fly from — think of it, papa dear! And then what do you think some one has told M. La Posterolle? That you are going to write a play about his marriage and your divorce — is it credible?

"Now that I have finished this much-merited scold-

ing, let us speak of pleasanter matters. I was much touched at your kind news about my dowry; with the salary of Gaston added, we shall live like princes. But what a pity that your idea of our living together is impossible! It would be delightful, loving each other as we do, but a thousand things that you seem not to have thought of oppose themselves to this association. Good Heavens! is not this life always tormented by a thousand contrarieties and privations? If you were with us how could mamma come to see me without always running the risk of meeting you? And these meetings would not only be disagreeable to you, but also most indecorous in the eyes of the world and even to the servants. The same thing would be true in regard to cousin, who would be obliged to stay away altogether, or you would be obliged to go upstairs whenever he appeared. And, setting aside my own personal feelings, Gaston is obliged to see M. La Posterolle very often. To him we owe Gaston's advancement; he arranged our marriage; when he is made Councillor of State, he and mamma and Ninette will live in Paris and we will constantly be in each other's houses. My dearest papa, your dream is nothing but a dream, cast it to the winds and think no more of it, consoling yourself with thinking that your daughters will see a great deal of you in any case — not only every other Sunday, as the law ordained.

"Understand, Gaston knows nothing of your project — it would have been too painful to him to refuse — he is so grateful to you for all your goodness and he begs you through me to do him one more little favor. He wishes you to inquire for him the price of some pearls that he intends to give me as a wedding present. I would like four rows with a ruby clasp. Will you, dear father, get some information on the subject? You will find at the end of

this letter a list of several other little commissions — and I hardly ask pardon for troubling you, for I have always been spoiled by the best and tenderest of papas. . ."

He could hardly read the last few lines through the mist of tears that dimmed his eyes. It was not hers at all — this heartless, moralizing letter, poor child! It had been dictated to her, her hand had been held, and behind Rose, sitting at her blue silk desk, he could see the treacherous smile of Mme. La Posterolle and hear her harsh voice commenting and correcting. By God! yes, there would be a great play to be made of his story, a play at which all fathers would weep and also perhaps some mothers, and it should be called "Father Goriot's Divorce."

CHAPTER IX.

"I DO not know, Monsieur, I will go and see."

Fagan could not help admiring the imperturbable coolness of the servant, who did not dare to say that his master was at home, when from the moment of his entrance, above the crash of the notes upon the piano, the voice, the never-to-be-forgotten voice of Councillor de Malville could be heard howling, yelping, meowing and neighing through the last score of his beloved composer.

The man returned and with an impassive countenance amidst the musical uproar that made the windows of the antechamber rattle, he said:

"If Monsieur will please — "

Councillor Garin de Malville, who was sitting at the piano, turned towards his visitor a long nervous face of no particular age, like all countenances whose lines are stamped and worn with grief, with lack-lustre eyes, a mouth that Wagner at this moment was stretching to its utmost depth, black and distorted and in a disorder as to teeth only to be compared to the great work-room itself in which music-scores and piles of law-books encumbered all the furniture, making it almost impossible to move about.

"Régis, my friend, just listen to this! The second act of 'Tristan and Isolde,' the love scene — *Isolde! Geliebte!*"

Seated on a heap of books, Régis resigned himself to this musical shower-bath, knowing that nothing would prevent the maniac from singing the piece to the end; he would interrupt himself with cries of rapture at every bar, and fall into voluptuous transports. "Is it not like the morphine puncture, the puncture that intoxicates and soothes? *Endlich! Endlich!*"

When at last Isolde and Tristan, exhausted, had loosened their embrace, the music-mad magistrate, swinging round on the piano-stool, asked Régis for news of his work and of his health. "Not very good, eh? I can see that — bachelor life, artist life. Why have you not followed your wife's example? She married again — she, the sly one! There is one who makes a mess of her Wagner! And your daughters; tell me about your daughters."

"It is of them, Councillor —"

His eldest daughter was to be married and enter a family of magistrates, the Rémorys, and he had counted upon M. de Malville to inform him as to their honorable standing. The councillor smacked his long, clean-shaven lip.

"Honorable, the Rémorys? O, yes, if you will — but a new-born magistracy that has not come up through the subordinate ranks; in fact, the only one of our presidents who wears a beard — when the dean of the faculty who formerly

wore one shaved his out of respect to the House! Now you know the kind of man that Rémory is; and if his son resembles him —"

Here followed a description of the Law Courts of Paris, with a disquisition on the old and new men so circumstantial and detailed that Fagan, already depressed and slightly feverish, would have left unceremoniously, but for a question that was trembling on his lips, the real *post scriptum* of his visit, that he had only managed to place as he arose to go. He wished to ask about a certain case — Hulin — yes, that is the name, Hulin — a judgment for separation, that perhaps the magistrate might remember.

"Do I remember? — Hulin of Havre — a splendid baritone, the man in all France who best understood Bach — he took less thoroughly to Wagner; still, he promised me to come this year to Bayreuth, poor devil!"

"What is it? What has happened to him?"

"Why he is dead, that is all."

"Dead! and when did he die?" stammered Fagan in a voice suddenly sunk to the minor key.

"About a month ago; he wrote to me on the fourth in the morning and he killed himself on the evening of the same day, in his bed, with an army revolver. Oh, he was a desperate, a delirious lover, that man!" And, reminded of his mania, the councillor, twisting his mouth and rolling up his eyes, began again to howl

"Iso—o—olde! Geli—i—iebte!"

while Régis, stunned and bewildered, made his way to the door, stumbling over music-books and dictionaries.

Dead! This explained Pauline's departure for Havre; really for Havre, where her presence would be necessary in settling up her husband's property. A few months of conventional mourning and this adorable woman could become his wife! There was nothing now to prevent it. The jealousy of Rose? That was a childish whim that could be easily appeased with kisses and some extra jewelry for wedding presents.

Dead! dead! could it be possible that this terrible word could be the creator of so much joy?

He was raving, talking aloud to himself as he left the house of the councillor and walked down the Rue des Saints-Pères towards the quays. So his years, his missing teeth, his whitening temples, were all nothing! He had not walked more briskly twenty years before, when he left his betrothed on the day that her parents had said:

"She consents and so do we."

The sky had not seemed to him then more beautiful than it did at the end of this April day, rose and pearl hued, with the pavements all wet, the first songs of the birds and first green shoots among the trees in the Tuileries gardens.

He, too, felt in all his being the pulse of the spring, but violent, with throbbings at his heart, with an oppression for which he had sought a

reason for several days, one that came doubtless from the moisture in the air, from the relaxing spring weather and now above all from the unhoped-for happiness that was in store for him.

Already he pictured to himself the great blue eyes, how they would melt with tenderness as an avowal of her love, and the dress that she would wear on that evening. He would take tea in the little parlor that night with a feeling of intimacy and security, knowing that he need never leave it again.

And from these happy dreams that he dreamed as he walked, so much joy was reflected in his face that several times he thought he observed people remarked him and that his smile as he passed by occasioned other smiles.

He stopped at a shop window in the Rue de la Paix, less to look at the jewelry than to think at his ease, when two voices, one masculine the other feminine, exclaimed as one voice: "Pardon, dear Master!" He turned quickly, and had before him a theatrical couple, the Couverchels, married about twenty years, well known in town for their tenderness and the admiration each had for the other.

The wife, engaged at the Vaudeville, had been ill for two years and was replaced and forgotten at her theatre. The manner in which the husband requested Fagan to procure an engagement for her, speaking of her beauty, her genius, looking with adoring eyes full of illusion at the scarred, sickly face of his wife, whose eyes sweetly

thanked him with the grateful pride of the woman and the artist — it was most touching. The engagement given and one promised to the husband, Fagan looked after them as they moved away with cheerful step, not walking apart like a fashionable couple, separate, with arms hanging at their sides, but arm in arm, closely linked, pressed against one another, so that one felt that death alone could part them.

And they were only comedians, those vain and shallow souls whose childish silliness he had so often ridiculed! Yes, it was among these humble players that he found his dream ideal of marriage. O, if Pauline would consent, how many rapturous years they might spend together thus, they two, united in spite of fate and the world!

"Monsieur is not ill?"

This was the first word from Anthyme as he saw the strange expression on his master's face when he returned that evening to his distant lodging.

No, no, not at all ill — only he still felt that feverish heat, that warm and superabundant expansion of life swelling his tightened chest. As he prepared to seat himself at the dinner table he saw the cloth and the plates whirl about in all their whiteness, his ears buzzed, he gasped for air, he tried to get to the window to open it, when the noise of a heavy fall caused Anthyme to return; he found his master lying on the ground as if struck by a thunderbolt.

When on a calm and golden afternoon Régis

recovered consciousness he found himself lying in his bed without being able to calculate how long he had been in the state of obliviousness from which he had just emerged, a state in which fever, delirium, awful nightmares red with blood and fire or discolored by drowning in turbid water, warm or icy, alternated according to the degree of fever in his limbs.

Two images he had seen clearly in the confusion of his ideas — his daughters, by turns affectionate and pretty and then with stony faces and dry eyes looking at him suffering and dying without holding out one little hand, without offering one drop of water to cool his thirst.

At last he returned to the every-day world, blinking his eyes a little at the bar of sunshine that like a golden scarf lay across the light-colored carpet of his quiet and orderly room and at the half-open window under its falling curtains, through whose folds he could see birds flying about and the waving of the high branches of the trees.

Close to the window was seated a woman in deep mourning bending towards the light, her eyes fixed on her needlework. From his bed Fagan could only see the white bent neck and a coil of ruddy hair, but he recognized Pauline Hulin at once and Maurice reading seated on a footstool at her feet. After all the agitating and sinister visions of his delirium, this one caused him such delight that he feared to see it disappear and fade away like the other vagaries of his fever.

He shut his eyes, opened them again and found the same picture before him, a ray of sunlight falling upon it from behind the curtain; only this time Maurice looked up, their eyes met, they smiled at each other, and all by himself, without crutches, the boy flew to his friend and threw himself into his arms.

Pauline approached also with outstretched hands and Régis saw at a glance that she was paler, her face thinner in its setting of black, with a new expression of sadness on her noble, lovable countenance. Weakened by illness, he wept and pressed kisses upon her hands.

"My love — my love!" and drawing her closer and lowering his voice on account of the boy, "and free, free at last!"

But she drew away from him.

"O, no, Régis, not that — let us never speak of that."

It is true that the recent tragedy was a comprehensible reason for delicacy and reserve, so he at once began to speak of other matters; he wished to know when she had returned. A week ago — really, a whole week near him and he had not known her — had not felt her presence through his delirium! On the evening of her arrival she had found poor Anthyme distractedly seeking for a nurse and, gratefully remembering the hours passed by Régis at the bedside of her child, she had installed herself as sister of charity to the writer until word could be sent to Mlles. de Fagan and they should come to take her place.

"Oh, yes, my daughters! Where are my daughters?" He became excited, his cheeks burned. Mme. Hulin tried to calm him. Anthyme had telegraphed to Corsica at the beginning of his master's illness, but Corsica was a long way off — perhaps the weather was too stormy, they might have no one to bring them — and then, who knows? perhaps among the letters come since his illness there might be an answer from his daughters.

And among the letters scattered over the bed two little notes with the Corsican postage stamp, signed Ninette, were read aloud by Mme. Hulin to the impatient father, too weak to decipher them himself.

Broken-hearted, poor Nina! broken-hearted in her first letter at the sudden illness of her father and also at the departure of the squadron, but hoping always that her father would get well and that the squadron would soon return. Rose was at Bastia with cousin, saying farewell to young Rémory, who was returning to the mainland.

The second letter announced that Rose and Ninette in the company of M. and Mme. La Posterolle would soon return to Paris, when his daughters would hasten to see their dear father.

Then came advice on hygienic subjects, to avoid the night air, the mists of the garden, to wear a certain lambswool flannel, with the address of the manufacturer added.

"It is very kind," murmured Fagan, caressing the blond silky head of little Maurice; "it is

very kind, but I shall have had time to die several times without seeing them."

Mme. Hulin did not contradict him for fear of augmenting a sorrow that she knew to be very deep; and leaving him alone with Maurice, she went into the next room, whither energetic beckonings from Anthyme had been summoning her for some moments.

Mademoiselle was there, a tall, dried-up woman in spectacles, who had come to ask news of M. de Fagan.

"Who wishes to know?" asked Mme. Hulin.

The Englishwoman answered arrogantly: "His daughters."

"So they are in Paris, then?"

"Probably."

Pauline lowered her voice, fearing lest De Fagan should hear:

"M. de Fagan is better, but if he should hear from any one but themselves that his daughters are in Paris it would be enough to kill him. You can tell this to the young ladies."

The governess looked Pauline Hulin up and down and received an untroubled glance in return. Turning on the heels of her square-toed shoes, she left the room without a word or a bow.

The La Posterolles had been settled for three days at a family hotel in Cours-la-Reine, awaiting the marriage of their daughter and the nomination of the head of the family to the Council of State. The first thought of Rose on their arrival had been for her father — she would have hastened

to him at once with Ninette had it not been for the objections raised by her mother, whose jealousy was aroused by this eagerness. Perhaps his disease was contagious, especially for people coming from a distance, from good air. They must find out first.

"But we have found out, Mamma! It is not contagious — congestion of the lungs."

Then Mme. La Posterolle, majestically compressing her lips, made allusion to a certain person that her daughters would run the risk of meeting at M. de Fagan's, outraging all the proprieties. Rose protested:

"Mme. Hulin? O, that is over long ago. I do not think she is even in Paris."

In order to make sure Mme. La Posterolle sent mademoiselle to the Boulevard Beauséjour; she returned in such a state of satisfaction that, while still at a distance on the Cours-la-Reine, she made signs to the ladies with her umbrella as they sat awaiting her on the balcony of the hotel.

"I was received by Mme. Hulin herself," she said triumphantly; and the mother replied:

"I knew well enough the affair had not ended," and the young girl, deeply wounded, said in an indifferent tone: "As he has this person to take care of him, he will not need us."

"Especially as he is very much better," added Mademoiselle.

Somewhat troubled, Ninette said to her sister:

"Shall we not go to see him, then?"

"You may, if you choose — I shall not."

"You are wrong," said the younger girl, who thought of numerous interests that her sister cared nothing about; but she was not able to shake her resolution.

Days passed — Régis still kept his bed. His convalescence was aided, however, by the mildness of the spring, the strengthening influence of reawakening nature. He began to receive a few visitors sitting up in bed; but the doctor forbade him to talk, so he passed long days playing dominoes with Maurice or listening to Pauline Hulin reading in her pleasant voice in the half-light of the cool and quiet room, the readings often accompanied and accentuated by the tender cooing of a ring-dove sitting on the window-sill. Sometimes, interrupting the reading or the game, the sick man with frowning brow would think aloud: "What can be the matter? Why do they not write to me?" The thought of his daughters was torture to him; then a few words from his kind friend, a few vague explanations uttered at random, would quickly dispel his anxieties, less by the excuses that she invented than by the caress in her voice and eyes while she uttered them.

Never since they had known each other had he felt himself so under the influence of her charm, her fascination, although Pauline made no effort to this end; on the contrary she withdrew her hands when he would have seized them and avoided their former topics of love and marriage, above all the least allusion to recent events —

the death of Hulin, her journey — all those things about which Régis was anxious to hear, but did not dare to inquire.

One day, however, they were alone together, she embroidering near the open window, through which she looked down from time to time into the garden, where the little boy was gambolling about, filling the air with joyous cries.

De Fagan gave a sigh from his bed. "Ah, that garden! — when I came back from Corsica, what a blow it was to me to find it deserted!" and as she made no answer: "Why did you not send me a line, a word to tell me that you were going?"

"My mind was so distracted when I went!" Mme. Hulin looked straight before her as she spoke. "The telegram from my father-in-law upset me so — 'Hulin is dying — come quickly.' At first I could not believe it; I thought it was a trap; and so, while I went alone to Havre, Annette took the child to her own home in the Vosges mountains; but the despatch was true — he was dead when I arrived."

She had never spoken so freely before — but of that of which he wished particularly to know, why her husband had again visited her after that horrible scene, she spoke not a word; and he, racked with suspicions and strange fancies, was forced to content himself with the question, asked with much embarrassment:

"Do you know why he killed himself?"

"No," she replied with an effort, "I do not

know. Perhaps he was tired of this life of discord, of this inextricable dilemma in which we found ourselves. Ah, poor man!"

Fagan muttered with compressed lips: "How pityingly you speak of him — can it be that you still love him?" Pauline answered, still without looking at him: "Do you think that he would be dead now, had I still loved him? No, no; but when I saw him there on his bed — his mouth blackened with the powder, when, only two days before — "

"Two days before?"

Without finishing the sentence she arose, looking out for a moment at the little boy playing in the garden below.

"And the father, the poor father," she said, sitting down again. "If you could have seen him at that death-bed beside all that remained to him of his son, you would have felt as much pity as I do. I spent those days at Havre at his side without once leaving him, without taking time to write a letter even. Besides, I did not know whether you had returned — and then — "

She looked out of the window again: "I do not see anything of Maurice."

The bell on the stairs rang, announcing a visitor for Fagan. In such cases Mme. Hulin always withdrew to the adjoining room, to avoid any gossip on the subject of her presence in his chamber; hastily gathering up her work-basket and its belongings, she prepared to disappear;

but he signed to her: "Stay — stay!" The conversation interested him deeply and he wished to finish it.

A door slams, hurried light footsteps are heard approaching, the door is opened hastily and Maurice announces with a cry of triumph: "Here they are! Here are Rose and Ninette!" He had seen them through the window ringing at the front door; and overjoyed partly on his own account and also on account of the happiness that it would bring to Régis, the child clapped his hands, threw a kiss to his mother and ran to meet Ninette, who came in first, her head in the air, her veil pinned tightly down under her chin, waiving the little fellow aside with an indifferent and careless nod.

"Here we are, father!"

She paused in the middle of the room, looking fixedly at Mme. Hulin as if she were surprised at finding her there.

"My daughters! my daughters!" cried De Fagan much moved and with outstretched arms. But Rose, who had just entered, stood still, as her sister had done, her advance arrested before the same apparition. He became angry.

"Well, my children, what is the matter?"

"The matter, father?" — it was big Rose, the elder of the sisters who spoke, one hand resting on the shoulder of her younger sister, the other outstretched with a melodramatic gesture of studied emotion, like the tremolo in her voice — "the matter is that neither Ninette nor I will

remain an instant longer here unless you order that woman to leave the room."

Taking her little boy, who had already hidden himself behind her skirts, by the hand, Pauline Hulin prepared to withdraw; but Fagan seized her quickly by the arm, and sitting upright in his bed: "You leave the room? You, the devoted, tireless nurse? You, who have taken care of me, saved my life, when every one else abandoned me? Let them leave the room rather, the undutiful daughters, who would have let me die without one word, one look!" Pauline tried to interrupt him. "Yes, I know, you always make excuses for them — their youth, their powerlessness, the counsels of those miserable women over there. I have always tried to believe you, but now it is finished — wicked girls, I say! — wicked, heartless girls! Oh, what they have made me suffer! — the many stabs I have received from them full in my heart!"

Then suddenly becoming tender again, the expression in his eyes and voice all transformed: "Rose, my big girl, I beg of you, ask pardon from the good woman whom you have so undeservedly outraged — do as I ask, my own Rose!"

Mme. Hulin protested with dignity; but he said: "Yes, yes, they must do it, I wish it — they are my children and they must obey me. Do you hear, Rose? Ninette, I command you!"

That the older girl hesitated was shown in the trembling of her tall, slender form, but jealousy triumphed.

"No — not that — never!"

"And you, Ninette, my darling?"

"O, I agree with my sister!"

Then his anger burst forth: "Leave me, wicked, ungrateful children! Go away from me, undutiful daughters! Let me never see you again! — I am divorced from my wife, now from henceforth I am divorced from my children. You may tell this to your mother — never again — do you understand? Never again!"

His face was ploughed with deep lines and his voice became hoarse as he fell back exhausted upon his pillow, the hand of Pauline tightly clasped in his — he gasped out feebly several times: "Never again!" as Rose left the room sobbing bitterly, followed by Ninette with dry eyes and a rebellious expression still on her face.

CHAPTER X.

AT the farthest end of the Avenue de l'Observatoire, under the dome of the chestnut trees whose thick green branches met overhead, Mme. La Posterolle stood one afternoon in June nervously tapping her heels against the asphalt pavement, where at intervals stood benches on which lounged ragged men out of employment, planning operations that would lead to the gallows.

Clad all in lilac from her stockings to her umbrella, with which the old lady's powdered wig she wore formed a striking contrast, she seemed hardly to remark the flattering surprise expressed on the faces of the artists and students who, before entering the neighboring fencing-school, turned to gaze at this elderly lady with the young, seductive eyes whose walk was as firm and commanding as that of an officer on his quarter-deck. Every few moments she looked at the tiny watch sunk in the leather of her bracelet and muttered angrily: "Five o'clock . . . ten minutes after five . . . twenty minutes after five." She was asking herself how much longer she would be obliged to wait — when Fagan made his appearance at the other end of the avenue, walking with the slow, uncertain step of one just recovering from an illness.

As he had utterly refused to see his daughters since the violent scene that had taken place during their last visit to him, his former wife had obtained this interview to arrange certain details appertaining to the marriage of Rose; and Pauline Hulin, always kind and judicious, hoping that he would become reconciled with his children, had decided to accompany him as far as the Luxembourg Gardens where she and Maurice were now waiting for him.

As soon as Mme. La Posterolle caught sight of him, thin and pale, his delicate blond moustache almost white, she ran towards him, emphasizing her cruel thought with a little laugh: "Beaten at last, O my former husband," at the same time approaching him with demonstrations of interest, with catlike, caressing little airs. He, remembering all her abominable acts of treachery up to the last one, the most cruel, the break with his daughters, felt for her only contempt and anger and also, because he was weak, a certain fear, as of the evil genius of his life, a malicious kobold hidden in the depths of this dark avenue of trees.

"It is good of you to come," she began, walking beside him and suiting her pace to his. As she could not go to see him on account of the proprieties nor he visit her, she had thought of their old meeting-place on the avenue where they could see each other and arrange matters of mutual interest.

He interrupted her quickly: "Why could you

not have consulted my lawyer? Everything is arranged with him."

"In which you showed yourself to be as always a gentleman." But it was not about the money alone that she wished to consult; it was about the breakfast and the bridal procession and where the contract should be signed. At his house? At hers? It would be equally embarrassing at either place. Then she had thought of the house of the Rémorys, the parents of the bridegroom. Did he approve of that? That is well. And now another thing. Of course the marriage, naturally a religious ceremony, would take place at La Madeleine. Rose desired above all things to enter the church on the arm of her father.

"She knows what she must do to gain that," said De Fagan, standing suddenly still, with a determined and imperious gesture. The lady's eyes drooped.

"A little note of apology to Mme. Hulin, I suppose?"

"Nothing else."

"O, she will make up her mind to do it. She is so determined to enter on the arm of her illustrious father!" She made a great point of the fact that it was vanity and not affection for him that prompted Rose. "Not so favored as my daughter, I shall come in with President Rémory."

"Shall we both be present?" said De Fagan amazed.

"Naturally, as we are marrying our daughter."

He walked on for a few minutes without speaking, then he murmured: "It is curious, all the same. . . . and your husband — La Posterolle?" His tone remained ironical.

"Just so — La Posterolle. I wished to speak to you of him — we cannot very well exclude him — my husband — Rose's step-father — and after all it was he who made the marriage. Before he entered the magistracy Gaston Rémory was in his office — don't you think he is entitled to a place in the procession?"

"I see no objection to it;" and plunged suddenly into a sea of reflections De Fagan allowed her to go on chattering uninterrupted at his side, shaking her bracelets, her parasol, praising the Rémorys, the president, the president's wife and the delightful St. Cyr cadet who was fluttering about Ninette. "Another marriage in perspective, my dear boy. An occasion for more meetings under our big trees. I love these big trees, don't you?"

He did not answer her — his mind was fully occupied with contemplation of the pictures called up by her words; an endless succession of melancholy meetings like this one and at the end of the long street his former wife each time more aged and changed, more tremulous and more malignant. She roused him with this request, taking him unawares: "And you, my little Fagan, when do you intend to be married? I suppose there is no longer anything to prevent it, now that M. Hulin is dead."

He shivered and looked searchingly at her.

"Ah, you know, then?"

"I know a great many things that you don't know, I fancy."

By the quivering of her lips and her sidelong glance he knew that she was preparing to hurt him, to hurt him dreadfully. But he was urged on by an unhealthy curiosity.

"What — tell me, what is it that I do not know?"

"Well, for instance, the reason why the husband of the lovely Pauline killed himself — I am sure that you have not the least idea. Well, he killed himself — these are his own words in a letter of farewell to a friend — because he could not live without a continuance of a happiness that had no morrow. Do you understand? — no, you do not — do you?"

He had understood so well, or thought he understood, poor Fagan! that, growing suddenly faint, he sat down upon one of the benches.

"It is quite natural, the first walk you have taken, one's legs are apt to be feeble," said Mme. La Posterolle, assiduously attentive; then in answer to Fagan's gesture inviting her also to seat herself: "No, thanks, I prefer to stand," and the Parisian, turning up her nose with a little grimace and leaning on her handsome parasol, swaying her body from side to side, continued: "You see the time was drawing near, as you know, when the child was to pass by the law's decree into the brutal clutches of the husband, to

the despair of the mother. Suddenly Hulin, more in love with her than ever, presented himself at the house of his wife; this was while you were in Corsica; and — I will repeat as nearly as possible his own words: 'If you will consent to what I ask of you, my love, I will sail away and you shall never hear of me again — besides this, I will draw up a paper which I will leave in your hands, renouncing all my legal rights over our child.'"

Fagan sprang to his feet. "This is absurd — such a document would have no value. No tribunal in the world —"

"I know, I know; but Mme. Hulin did not know and probably her husband did not either; I have it from Councillor de Malville — well, there, you see, I have betrayed my authority! but that only proves the authenticity of my story. So Malville told me that contracts of this sort, these amicable arrangements, are as frequent among the upper classes as among the peasantry and that in short in this country, where no one is supposed to be ignorant of the law, hardly any one knows the first word about it. But to return to our Hulins — the unhappy woman, terrified at the idea of losing her son, consented to what he demanded — the exercise of his rights as a husband for one night, sacrificing the woman to the mother. It was hard, but you must allow that the details about this night would be an interesting study in casuistry. She has a horror of her husband, doubtless — only he was n't her husband

— it was a legal separation; she had lived as a widow for four or five years — and then she had arrived at the age when women in our country understand love and do not merely endure it." Oh, the poisoner! how artfully she distilled her venom and how eagerly she watched the working of its effects upon a pale and hollow face that would have inspired any other woman with pity.

"So that when he returned to Havre after his rapturous night this triumphant husband could not make up his mind to sail away, preferring to die rather than live after this happiness without a morrow, just as he said in his letter to Malville."

Fagan arose and muttered between his clinched teeth: "Well, for a depositary of the secrets of the dying, I commend him, your precious Malville!"

"You may well say so," she answered with her evil smile. "You have only to play Wagner to him; he will give himself up to you entirely."

They walked on side by side a few moments in silence, and then, observing his abstraction, she said taking his hand, "Well, we must say good-bye. The children are over there near by; will you not see them?"

He hesitated a moment and then said angrily: "No — another time."

"Very well; I will see you soon, my little Fagan!"

She left him at the crowded crossing and walked with light and buoyant steps to the corner

of the Boulevard Port-Royal where a large open landau bright with colored parasols was awaiting her.

"Alone?" said Rose disappointed at not seeing her father.

"Never mind, everything is arranged," said Mme. La Posterolle lightly, and taking the big hand shaped like a washwoman's paddle that mademoiselle held out to assist her to enter the carriage: "ah, the good fellow," she added, "he bears no malice — he will witness the contract — he will come to the wedding."

"And my dowry?" said Ninette; "did you speak to him of my dowry?"

"Of course; but what is better than all — I think I have made his marriage with Mme. Hulin impossible to him."

Ninette laughed gayly under her little veil: "Ah, then, the rivalry is done with," she said, and as the carriage began to move, Rose, having no longer a cause for jealousy, her tall form swaying gracefully with the motion of the carriage, murmured, "Oh, my poor papa!"

He meantime threaded the squares bright with brilliant flowers and grass, over which the setting sun threw a network of golden light, to rejoin Mme. Hulin and her boy at the Luxembourg. As he walked along, looking toward the high railings of the garden, its bars casting long violet shadows that seemed to lengthen out endlessly, he thought of the friend who was waiting for him behind that high barrier stretching into the dis-

tance, an imaginary barrier, a symbol of the obstacles that separated their destinies. He could now understand the scruples that had made the charming and fastidious Pauline, who had appeared to love him when she was not free, repulse him suddenly when she became a widow and her own mistress. Exaggerated scruples which he would doubtless be able to dissipate with time and the perseverance of his devotion.

So he hastened on radiant, inhaling with the quickened senses of convalescence the warm air and the mingled perfumes from flower-beds refreshed by the feathery spray from the sprinklers that fell with a murmuring sound like a fountain; but a few steps farther on certain phrases spoken by Mme. La Posterolle recurred to him. The poison began to work, to run through his veins. A night — a whole night in the arms of that man! It surely must have been a sacrifice for her to make, for she loved him, Fagan. She loved him, that was plain enough to see. In giving herself to another she had lied, then, with all her soul and all her body — and this voluntarily, since the man had no longer any rights over her; in fact he had not been her husband for several years.

No longer her husband! With these few words alone had that miserable woman pierced him to the quick — and how she had been able to make him suffer! He was no longer her husband, that is to say, the person whom she detested, who disgusted her mentally and physically. A stranger,

an unknown in her chaste widowed bed, and, as Mme. La Posterolle had remarked, just at the age when the women of our country —

O, her great blue eyes melting under the caresses of another, her pearly white shoulders quivering and as it were shimmering with passion — in spite of himself he kept imagining all this — he saw it always before him and his friend knew it — she knew that if they should marry this dreadful vision would always pursue them both, would embarrass them and defile their happiness. Yes, Pauline was right — now he also shared all her scruples.

And yet he shrank from having an explanation with her. For after all this feeling might change, might become fainter by daily association with each other and daily exchange of tenderness — and who knows if, on some beautiful spring day like this, victorious passion might not triumph and wipe out everything with a burst of cleansing and revivifying flame!

He arrived at the gate of the Luxembourg Garden whither his cruel and contradictory musings had slowly guided him. Before entering he turned and shook his clenched hand towards the avenue paths, through whose sombre verdure glimpses could be seen of the slender and voluptuous statues by Carpeaux supporting the world in their raised hands — those four figures that unite in themselves all the feminine snares of the earth. "Vermin," he cried, "how well you understand how to make the flesh of man to bleed!"

A little boy's hand slipped into his drew him towards the garden, as if his faithful friend from the distant bench on which she was seated had divined how he was suffering and had sent Maurice to draw him from his melancholy reflections.

"Heavens, how pale you are!" said Mme. Hulin when he came up to her; and as she asked him if he did not feel cold, her voice betrayed an unspoken anxiety, that instinctive fear a woman feels in the presence of a danger that is concealed from her, but one she divines. What was it? What had he just learned that distorted his face in such a manner?

"If you would sit down for a moment — perhaps you are only a little tired."

"No, let us walk, on the contrary; I have need to feel your arm within mine."

He saw that she was trembling and as ill at ease and as troubled as he was himself. Should he, notwithstanding his recent resolutions, have to explain frankly and at once and so end the uncertainty that was torturing both their hearts? The boy was running before them and they had mechanically turned into a path to the right, the one to the left being at that hour crowded to the railings on account of the music, whose strains came to them through the trees in snatches mingled with the shrill cries of children and of swallows — that mad, gay life of young things that seems to grow more intense as the daylight fades. Their walk seemed to him so sweet in

the calmness of the close of day, the woman at his side was so dainty in her sombre mourning, her complexion as clear as her child's, that Fagan had not the courage to trouble the harmonies so restful to him and contented himself with simply giving an account of the interview, only so far as it related to the marriage of his daughter.

"Ah, dear friend, how right you were! What a muddle divorce is and what amazing complications it brings with it! Rose is to be married in a few days and the marriage will be in every way according to rule, but her parents being divorced, the wedding will present this odd appearance."

And he amused himself by describing the procession.

First the father conducting the bride, behind them Mme. La Posterolle, the mother, but no longer bearing the same name as her daughter, then La Posterolle, the most conventional of men, taking part also in the pageant and feeling perfectly at ease in the position.

"You can picture to yourself this procession climbing the interminable steps of the Madeleine, entering the great doors and then all the blazing tapers and waves of melody pouring from the organ to welcome this discordant gathering. Ah, if Paris still knew how to laugh!"

Fagan did not laugh himself, wounded as he was in his paternal love, his daughters lost to him forever. And as Pauline attempted once more to excuse them, Régis smiled grimly a little disillusioned smile very near to tears. "No,

dear friend, you are wrong; my children are mine no longer, taken complete possession of by that wicked woman. My lawyer forewarned me of it. It has been the gradual work of an ant or a spider, slowly, by pin pricks from day to day; and, think of it! until the end of my life I am bound to that creature; she will never set me free. After Rose's marriage will come the marriage of Ninette; later, when we are grandparents, we will have to meet at the baptisms. She will be sponsor with me — a sponsor who will teach my grandchildren to detest me as she has taught my daughters to do. Ah, divorce! that severance of a tie which I hailed as a deliverance, you remember, of which I was so proud — which made me so happy! But when one has children, divorce does not solve the problem."

Mme. Hulin shook her head gently.

"When there are children, a separation is not much better — it is only fictitious, imaginary — the child is always there between the father and the mother."

She said this with the deep, melancholy voice in which she spoke of her real sorrows — for her ordinary voice was as crystal clear as was her whole character.

"What, then, is to be done?" murmured Fagan. After a long silence filled with the last fading notes of the march from Lohengrin he finished aloud the mute conference of their thoughts. "Yes, perfect purity in marriage — that would be the only true happiness. To say

to oneself in choosing a wife — when I come to die it will be on her breast that I will lay my head to fall asleep, hers will be the lips that will close my eyes. Therefore I should wish the breast to be very tender, very pure, the lips unsullied and for me alone. This is marriage as I understand it."

Pauline sighed sorrowfully. She made no other reply, approving and assenting.

They had just descended the broad rounded steps of the terrace and were walking round the great fountain that shivered under the red sky in the sadness of the gathering twilight. This sadness communicated itself to them, even to the child, who had ceased to run and now clung to the folds of his mother's black gown.

"Let us go home," she said presently. "You have been out a long time for a first walk."

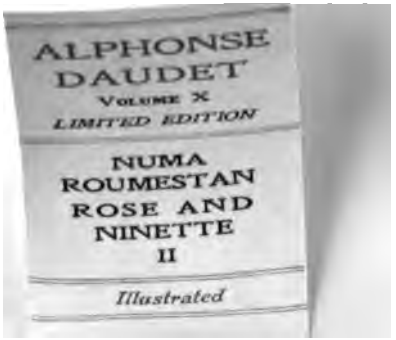
"Yes, let us go home," answered Régis in the same dejected tone.

At the exit he was making his way through the crowd to seek for a carriage, when he saw, a few steps away from him, Mme. La Posterolle and her daughters, who had probably stopped to listen to the music and were just stepping into their carriage. Their conspicuous costumes and their somewhat showy equipage attracted a gaping crowd — of which fact Rose and Ninette seemed very proud and pleased.

"Let us get away," whispered Fagan to his companion. To see his darlings there, so near to him, radiant in their gay attire, and not be able

to take them in his arms — it was too great a suffering. Here indeed was a victim of divorce! — this wretched man, who stood watching his daughters and their mother, his true family, driving fast away in their carriage, gay with laughter and bright ribbons, while he remained restless and unhappy on the edge of the sidewalk in the gathering darkness of night, with this woman and this child, whose deep mourning, which he was conscious of but could not share, told him clearly how far apart they were, and that probably they would remain strangers to each other forever.

THE END.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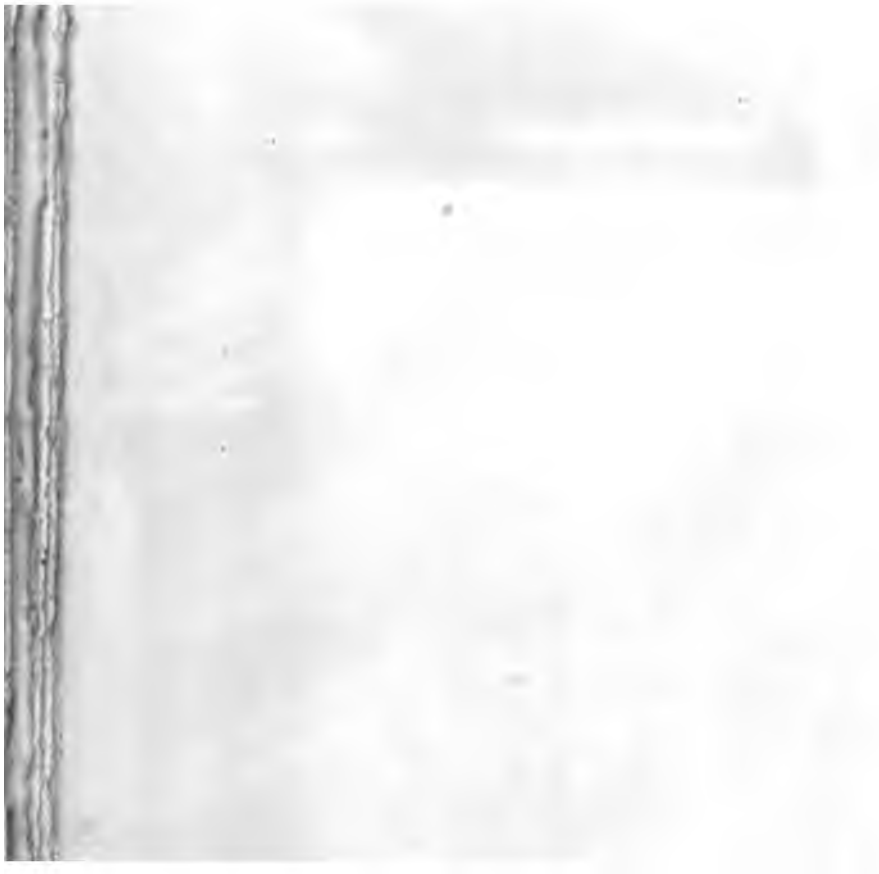

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